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## FURTHER CORRESPONDENCE

RESPECTING

# SYRIA

PART 8

January to December 1954

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FURTHER CORRESPONDENCE CONCERNING  
SYRIA—PART 8  
GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE

VY 1013/3

No. 1

PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT CONCERNING RECENT ARRESTS

*Mr. Gardener to Mr. Eden. (Received January 29)*

(No. 44)

*Damascus,*

(Telegraphic)

*January 29, 1954.*

President broadcast statement concerning recent arrests on the afternoon of the 28th instant. This was published in Press on the morning of the 29th. Following are the main points:—

- (a) The object of the régime is to maintain in its true course the democratic system prevalent in Syria.
- (b) All Syrians should recognise that their only enemies are Zionists and Colonisers.
- (c) The President's call to unity was neglected by selfish elements who attempted to exploit unlawfully the restoration of party activity in order to undermine the Constitution.
- (d) By exploiting the Nationalistic spirit of the students they have jeopardised the future of the country.
- (e) The passive attitude of others is almost as bad (passivity of Syrian opinion being stressed throughout).
- (f) Criminal elements deceived some simple-hearted citizens and prepared a general insurrection.
- (g) Armed clashes have led to the imposition of martial law in certain parts of the country.
- (h) Ringleaders have been arrested and will be tried.

VY 1016/13

No. 2

POLITICAL SITUATION

*Mr. Gardener to Mr. Eden. (Received February 3)*

(No. 60)

*Damascus,*

(Telegraphic)

*February 3, 1954.*

Internal Situation.

For some days past Press has blamed a foreign hand for disturbances in Syria especially in the Jebel Druse and left little doubt that Britain was the country concerned. Yesterday Britain was accused by name.

2. On February 3, Press published moderately worded statement on local situation broadcast by President on February 2 (copy by bag). President stated that martial law had been declared in certain areas and some people had been arrested because they had provoked unrest. In Jebel Druse, however, some simple-minded people had had recourse to arms which authorities had been obliged to suppress. During last month unusual foreign activity had been noted in named area and modern arms had been confiscated. President hoped none arrested would on trial be proved guilty of anything more than unlicensed political activity.

3. This released a torrent of Press attack on Iraq for harbouring and aiding dissidents and British for our friendship for Iraq and helping latter's design to achieve fertile crescent. Same attack is reproduced from Egyptian paper *Gumhuriat*. One paper under heading "British Plot" states certain arrested leaders had documents proving contact with neighbouring Arab State friendly to Britain and desirous to unify Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon under one crown. Jamilis federation proposal is described as British plan for colonisation.

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No. 3

THE RECENT DISTURBANCES IN SYRIA AND THEIR EFFECT UPON  
THE POSITION OF THE PRESENT RÉGIME

*Mr. Gardener to Mr. Eden. (Received February 15)*

(No. 29. Confidential) *Damascus,*  
Sir, *February 9, 1954.*

I have the honour to report upon the recent disturbances in Syria and their effect upon the position of the present régime.

2. In my despatch No. 198 of the 15th of December, 1953, I described the disturbances which occurred in December, mainly among the students of Damascus and Aleppo. Following the reimposition of order, which did not prove difficult, and the removal of Colonel Hussein, the Chief of Police in Damascus, to which I referred in my letter No. 10104/214/53 of the 28th of December, 1953, President Shishakli seemed to have reaffirmed his completely dominant position. However, even superficial observers were aware of an appreciable current of discontent in the atmosphere. The President, with his efficient security forces, must have had a great number of detailed reports on the various manifestations of discontent. Among the more notable of these were reports of political talks in Aleppo between Nationalist and Populist leaders, hitherto noted for their rivalry; an announcement that a delegation of leaders of the People's Party would go to Riyadh, from where of course they might be expected to tour the Arab countries to secure support for their opposition to the régime in Syria; the appearance of an anti-Shishakli pamphlet to which several opposition leaders had somewhat incautiously signed their names; and, probably most important of all, the unrest in Homs. One of the Homs newspapers was remarkably outspoken in its criticism of various official acts and particularly of the behaviour of the police in Homs. Akram Haurani, the leader of the Socialist parties and probably the most dangerous intriguer among Syrian politicians was known to be stirring up trouble, particularly in Homs, and it is very likely that he was trying to suborn junior army officers.

3. It looks as though President Shishakli saw the cumulative, though still unorganised, opposition to the régime growing, and calmly determined to nip it in the bud before it could seduce the waverers into joining the

opposition or break forth in positive action. He therefore planned the arrest in Damascus, Homs and Aleppo of the main opposition leaders, except those of the Communist Party. This operation was carried out efficiently and without fuss on the night of the 26th-27th of January. The reaction was nothing more startling than a strike by the Damascus lawyers. Further arrests followed, mostly of minor agitators. The only prominent Communist to be put in prison was arrested not for his communism, but because he was a leading lawyer. There was no sign of disturbance in the cities where the arrests took place. The reopening of the University in Damascus was postponed again, but this was not unexpected and life in general proceeded normally. The branch of the University situated in Aleppo remained open. President Shishakli was strikingly vindicated in his belief that he could round up the urban opposition leaders with impunity.

4. In his confidence President Shishakli arrested the Amir Hassan al Atrash, a prominent member of the leading tribal family in the Jebel Druze, who was, however, resident in Damascus. No special precautions seem to have been ordered in the Jebel Druze, and but for another incident there might have been no disturbances there. A few hours before the series of planned arrests were due to take place, two young men, the sons of Sultan Pasha Atrash, generally considered to be the most powerful of the Druze leaders, were found to be among those distributing the obnoxious pamphlet signed by some of the opposition leaders. The gendarmerie immediately attempted to arrest the young men in their home village. This led to a fracas which was the beginning of the disturbances in the Jebel Druze. A consequent attempt to arrest Sultan Pasha himself considerably aggravated the situation. The Government forces surrounding his house were themselves surrounded by Druze tribesmen. Skirmishing continued for three or four days and there were casualties on both sides. However, it is doubtful whether more than a part of the Jebel Druze was prepared to rise in support of the Atrash family; and the

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army reinforcements which were sent to the area from the nearby Israeli front had to do little more than fire a dozen 75 mm. shells in order to quell the armed opposition. Their subsequent treatment of the inhabitants of the disaffected villages has probably bred much enmity to the régime and the army, which will not easily be forgotten. Reports as to whether Sultan Pasha himself is still at large or not are contradictory, but even if he is still, as the President states, a fugitive on the eastern fringes of the Jebel Druze he is powerless to take effective action against the régime.

5. Ever since it was first occupied in the 1860's by the Druze retreating before Maronite hostility in the Lebanon, the history of the Jebel Druze has been little more than a series of revolts against authority. The tribesmen have a fiercely independent nature and a bellicose reputation. Their land being of the poorest quality, they find it convenient to accept subsidies either to fight or to remain neutral. A number of Druze have undoubtedly been in the pay of Israel, in which country there are in any case some 16,000 members of their religious fraternity. Druze separatism was encouraged by the French authorities under the Mandate; the Druzes themselves have since taken care to protect it both for its own sake and to increase their bargaining power. On this principle the Druze are generally against the Government and it would be quite natural if they had been intriguing with other opposition groups. There is therefore a basic affinity between the arrest of opposition leaders and disturbances in the Jebel Druze. But on this particular occasion the Druze revolt seems to have arisen spontaneously and on the spur of the moment as the result of the attempted arrests of Sultan Pasha and his sons. For both the Druzes and the Government the revolt was particularly inopportune and both were taken by surprise when it occurred. For the Druzes it was inopportune because the recent disturbances on the Israeli frontier had drawn large Syrian army units fully mobilised to the fringe of their territory. Furthermore, they had had no time to mobilise themselves and to close the ranks of the Druze clans generally at enmity with one another save in the face of the common enemy. For Shishakli it was perhaps even more unfortunate, for this fortuitous revolt appeared by the accident of time to be a protest against the arrest of the urban

opposition leaders which otherwise had gone so smoothly. It did, however, provide some colour for his charges against the politicians that they were plotting a general insurrection.

6. President Shishakli's own view of the activities of the urban opposition leaders is, I think, given quite sincerely in his broadcast statement of the 28th of January, the text of which was enclosed in my despatch No. 26 of the 9th of February. Since he came to power, Shishakli's aim has been to rule the country himself in all essentials while making it appear that the régime is in fact a parliamentary democracy. I doubt whether he has much conception of the fundamental contradiction between the two horns of this policy. But at any rate it must be as clear to him as to everyone else that it has largely failed. Having tried the experiment of what he regarded as liberalism and having found in return nothing but passive resistance and intrigue among the politicians he evidently became impatient, and determined both to reaffirm his own position and to demonstrate the worthlessness and powerlessness of the politicians. This he achieved by his series of planned arrests, which may, I think, be regarded as a purely internal affair. They left the régime much where it stood before; stronger because the powerlessness of the opposition was exposed and the leaders imprisoned, weaker because it showed that the President despaired of basing his policy upon broad national consent.

7. The revolt in the Jebel Druze, however, had much wider implications for the Government, which are reflected in the President's comments reported in my telegram No. 60 of the 3rd of February and in the newspaper articles enclosed in my despatch No. 28 of the 9th of February. In the first place the leaders of a revolt in the Jebel Druze might very well have a large though irregular army at their command. Then the Druzes occupy a strategic area of difficult country upon the south-eastern border of the country, and could therefore draw supplies from Jordan and particularly from Iraq. This is the hub of the problem. During Shishakli's régime Syrian-Iraqi relations have been consistently poor. Sir John Troutbeck's despatch No. 31 of the 3rd of February shows how blatantly Iraqi politicians declare their desire to interfere in Syrian affairs. Iraq harboured Colonel Safa whom Shishakli seems to regard as one of the most dangerous of his

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opponents. Modern arms, including anti-tank rifles or guns were found in the possession of the Atrash family, and it is evident that the Syrians believe they came from Iraq. Furthermore, the Iraqi Military Attaché in Damascus is said by the Syrian authorities to have engaged in activities detrimental to Syria, and was therefore required to leave.

8. It is evident from all this that the Syrian Government considered the revolt in the Jebel Druze to have been largely instigated by Iraq, possibly even as a prelude to a foreign invasion. This puts the revolt in the Jebel Druze in rather a different category from the arrest of the urban politicians. This view is reinforced by the fact that the frontier with the Lebanon was closed only some days after the arrests. It was not so much a threat to security as the vocally expressed disposition of the Lebanon to interfere in Syrian affairs which was the cause. But much more disturbing to Syrians is the widely held belief that the Iraqi (and Jordanian) Governments are merely British agents. Thus to most Syrians there is an *a priori* reason to suspect that the revolt in the Jebel Druze was plotted by Britain; and the respect for our power is still sufficient to make this a very alarming prospect for the independence of Syria.

9. With this prejudice in their minds, the Syrians were quick to find "evidence" of British interference. The arms discovered in the possession of the Atrash were British arms, which may well be true. Britons had visited the Jebel Druze. They were in league with the Israelis. They were also in league with the Iraqis. They had used their well-known influence with the latter to incite Iraqi interference in Syria. All this fitted in very well with the burden of Syrian propaganda in the last month, which has been to attack the "coloniser" as much as the Zionist.

10. I doubt whether President Shishakli believes all this "evidence," but I am afraid that he is predisposed to think that our interference is likely. I imagine that

most Syrians are convinced of it. This does not make them love us any more, but at least it reinforces their belief that Britain is a Power to be reckoned with and should not be lightly offended. There is no evidence at all that British interests in Syria have suffered; if anything the reverse is true.

11. The Jebel Druze is at least outwardly quiet again. What then has been the effect of the disturbances upon the standing of the régime? In my opinion, singularly little. As in the case of the arrest of the politicians there is a balance between advantage and disadvantage. Any revolt is of course a shock to any régime, and this revolt has certainly bred a good deal of disaffection and rancour. At the same time some of the President's potential opponents have been put down, and his mastery of the country reaffirmed. His stand against the alleged foreign interference may well have earned him kudos and support among those who do not take a deep interest in party politics.

12. The conclusion of all this is the obvious one, that a military dictatorship depends upon the army. Secure provision cannot be made against an assassin's bullet, but barring this ever present possibility Shishakli will remain master of the country until he loses control of the army, and of this there is no sign at present. If he were to die suddenly it would still be the army which would be the arbiter of the position. The greatest danger both to President Shishakli and the army would be a serious deterioration in the economic position of Syria. The President would then lose the confidence of the army and fall; the army might lose confidence in itself and fall into factions. So serious an economic deterioration does not at present seem likely.

13. I am sending copies of this despatch to Her Majesty's Ambassadors at Amman, Bagdad, Beirut, Cairo and Tel Aviv and to the Head of the British Middle East Office at Fayid.

I have, &c.

A. J. GARDENER.

VY 1016/29

No. 4

PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS ON THE DRUSE DISTURBANCES

*Mr. Gardener to Mr. Eden. (Received February 11)*

(No. 85. Confidential)  
(Telegraphic)

*Damascus,  
February 11, 1954.*

My telegram No. 82.

When I saw the President to-day he claimed that he did not consider us directly or indirectly responsible for the Druse disturbances. He said, however, that anti-British feeling was endemic and that the Syrians in general held us responsible for the actions of our ally Iraq. If he announced our innocence the public would, for these reasons refuse to believe him, and even consider him mental. However, in response to pressure and argument I got him to promise to curb the Press and to try to insert in his next statement a sentence to the effect that there was no proof whatever of British guilt. He also agreed to arrange for some such statement to be made in Parliament.

2. While he may now think we did not directly cause the Druse disturbances, he left me in no doubt that he still considers us at fault for not obliging Iraq to restrict Safa's activities to those accorded to political refugees.

3. He spoke angrily against Iraq and her policy towards Safa. Letters signed by the latter had been found in Sultan Pasha's house and one also signed by Safa urging Syrian insurrection against the present régime had, he claimed, been found last week in Amman. I strongly reminded him of Iraq's position as independent nation and his obligations respecting the laws of Arab hospitality. The President argued that we could and should intervene with Iraq in consequence of our rights and duties as allies of Iraq and seekers of political stability in the Near East. He ended with the hope that in exchange for his promised action Her Majesty's Government would make representations to Iraq. While it is clearly in his interest to use us as a lever on the Iraqi Government, I think he, like the majority of Syrians, sincerely believes in our power over Iraq.

4. Speaking from the Syrian angle I venture to endorse the President's hope. While I have no proof of Iraq's complicity in the Druse disturbances, the licence apparently given to Safa, and his Prime Minister's impetuous advocacy of Arab federation, have produced a disturbed climate here and engendered hostility not only to herself and her political objectives, but also to Her Majesty's Government. Representations along these general lines were considered earlier (please see Damascus telegram No. 67 of April 15, 1953 and Baghdad telegram No. 215 of April 21).

VY 1011/1

No. 5

SYRIA: ANNUAL REVIEW FOR 1953

*Mr. Gardener to Mr. Eden. (Received February 22)*

(No. 31. Confidential) *Damascus,  
February 12, 1954.*

Sir,  
With reference to Lord Salisbury's circular despatch No. 078 of the 9th of September, 1953, I have the honour to submit the following review of political events in Syria for the year 1953, together with an annex giving a summary of the year's principal events arranged chronologically.

2. Syrian affairs in 1953 continued to be dominated by the personality of General Adib Shishakli. The character of the man is difficult to analyse. Ostensibly a military dictator, he has an almost pathological

desire for the support and, indeed, the affection of all sections of the community and sees himself as the Arab counterpart of Ataturk or even of Saladin. This explains to some extent the internal events of the past twelve months during which Shishakli has attempted to give his military régime a democratic façade and to broaden the basis of his support in the country. This experiment has not been successful.

3. The abortive conspiracy against Shishakli at the end of 1952—the so-called army officers' plot—consolidated his hold



over the country. The first serious challenge to his authority had failed and the way was open to introduce the constitutional reforms which would give Syria, at all events in theory, a less authoritarian form of government. Arrangements were put in hand for the drafting of a new Constitution on the American model. A referendum was held in the summer, the Constitution adopted by a large majority (due partly to the fact that the Opposition parties boycotted the referendum and partly to the fact that Shishakli "stuffed" the ballot boxes), and Shishakli was elected President of the Syrian Republic. The former Head of State, General Selo, disappeared from the political scene and eventually took service (like many Syrians before him) with the Saudi Arabian Government. The change was more apparent than real. The new President had been the dictator of Syria since 1950 and the new Constitution merely confirmed his position in a form which was not inconsistent with the development of Syria on democratic lines.

4. The President had yet to put to the test his professed support for a democratic form of government. Elections for the new Syrian Parliament were announced for October. A certain amount of freedom was allowed to the press and opposition was permitted up to a point. Nevertheless, the election was held in an atmosphere of almost complete apathy, at least sixty of the eighty-two seats being won by members of the Arab Liberation Movement. Again the elections were rigged to secure this result, a procedure which concealed the proportion of votes cast for the Left-wing parties. Indeed, the Minister of the Interior resigned shortly before the election in protest against Government interference in the electoral arrangements.

5. The real significance of these events is that they enabled the President's opponents to come into the open. The Opposition parties of the Right and Left—namely the Nationalists and Populists on the one hand and the Arab Revival (Ba'ath) and Socialist Parties (which later fused under the leadership of Akram Hourani) and the Communists on the other—made good use of the opportunity afforded by the relaxation of the President's iron grip. There was a spate of political activity during the latter part of the year. Outspoken criticism of the régime appeared in certain sections of the press, meetings were organised by the Opposition parties, and signed pamphlets, strongly anti-Shishakli in character, made their appear-

ance. The Communist Party, still proscribed in Syria, did not take an overt part in these activities but worked through the fellow-traveller Arab Socialist Party which was particularly active among the students. This political freedom was exploited mainly by the Left-wing parties in inciting the anti-Shishakli student demonstrations in December which, although not in themselves serious, were the first disturbances of their kind for a considerable time. They showed that, even if the Opposition did not represent a serious threat to the present régime, it could provoke trouble and unrest with incalculable consequences. These events caused a certain hardening in the President's attitude towards the Opposition. While not directly interfering with the precarious freedom accorded to his opponents after the introduction of the new Constitution, he introduced certain measures to prevent further demonstrations, including the temporary closure of Damascus University. His suspicions fastened on Colonel Hussein, Director-General of Police and Security, his only serious rival, who was said to have had contacts with the Opposition parties. As a result, Hussein was transferred to Washington at short notice as military attaché.

6. The events of the past twelve months enable some assessment to be made of the extent of the opposition to the President. There is a good deal of dissatisfaction in the country, particularly among the former ruling families, who regard Shishakli and his henchmen as upstarts, and also among the commercial middle-class who are being heavily taxed to support the military expenditure which is the main pillar of the régime. Elsewhere, there is a vague current of discontent due more to the chronic Arab hostility to the man in power than to tangible causes. On the other hand, the security and relative prosperity of the country make it difficult for the Opposition to exploit this situation and, failing a marked deterioration in the economic situation, it is unlikely that they could muster sufficient active support to lead a mass movement against the régime. The real malcontents, still a small minority, who might be prepared to resort to force, are to be mainly found in the Arab Revival (Ba'ath) and the Arab Socialist Parties. The growth and increased activity of this group has been one of the main internal trends in Syria during the year and has provided a useful cover organisation for the Communist Party which cannot operate openly. A surprisingly large number of votes were cast at the general election for candidates with Communist and fellow-

traveller sympathies, and there has been clear evidence of Communist activity in the main urban centres. This is not to say that there is any marked tendency towards communism in Syria to-day. But the Communist and Left-wing parties have been able to assume the mantle of the would-be liberator and to attract the votes, if not the wholehearted support, of many Syrians who want to express their opposition to the régime, but are completely ignorant of, or untouched by, the ideological basis of communism.

7. In spite of this opposition, the President's position remained unassailable throughout the year. The strength of that position can be judged by his efforts to come to terms with the Opposition and to secure their co-operation. Thus, in addition to the introduction of democratic forms and the greater freedom given to his opponents, the President allowed Akram Hourani and the other two leaders of the Arab Revival and Socialist Parties to return from the Lebanon, where they had sought asylum after the events of December 1952. He has also made a determined though unsuccessful effort to persuade Nationalist and Populist leaders to join his Government. The failure of these attempts at conciliation must be attributed to (1) the Opposition's legalistic refusal to accept the Shishakli Constitution and (2) Shishakli's known inability to delegate any power at all to anyone, even his chosen Ministers. The result has been to create the semblance of democracy with a puppet Government and a Parliament which, despite flashes of opposition, is little more than a rubber stamp to endorse the dictates of the President. If 1953 has seen the consolidation of the President's position, it has also been marked by the increase in power of the President's own office, which has usurped the functions of other Government Departments and made it virtually impossible to secure a decision of any importance without reference to the President himself.

8. The President's hold on the administrative machine is matched by his control of the army. In spite of rumours of discontent, there are no signs of disloyalty among senior army officers. In the last analysis, the army is the arbiter of the political situation and, so long as the President is assured of its support, it is difficult to see how another *coup d'état* could be brought about. The army is not an effective fighting force by Western standards; but its morale is good and it is being developed as rapidly as the

supply of equipment (nearly all of which has to be imported) permits. According to the published figures, military expenditure accounted for 40 per cent. of the total budget for 1953 and, in fact, probably amounted to about 60 per cent. through concealed credits and the use of the surpluses of Government Departments. This is a heavy burden for a country with a total budget of little more than £20 million sterling. The cost of the army remains one of the major causes of discontent.

9. Thus, from the internal standpoint, 1953 in Syria ended on a troubled note. The efforts of the military dictator to come to terms with the Opposition had not succeeded and the new Constitution and the election of Parliament had not changed the fundamental character of the régime. As in the past, there were dark clouds on the horizon, although there was no reason to suppose that the President could not deal adequately with the situation when the storm eventually broke.

10. Syrian foreign affairs throughout 1953 continued to be dominated by the Palestine problem. The threat from Israel, however real, had been a powerful argument in support of a military dictatorship. The consolidation of Shishakli's position enabled him to take a more objective view, and there were signs that he might be willing to recognise that Israel had come to stay and to modify his policy accordingly. Thus, negotiations with Israeli representatives took place during the early part of the year with a view to replacing the demilitarised zone by a frontier line. However, any hopes that Syria was about to adopt a more realistic attitude towards Israel were shattered by the Jordan waters dispute, the Qibya incident and the subsequent debates in the Security Council. At the end of the year, a large proportion of the Syrian army was still massed on the Israeli frontier. Fear and distrust of Israel also gravely prejudiced the results of Mr. Johnston's visit at the end of October to promote the T.V.A. plan, irrespective of its merits.

11. Syria continued to pay lip service to the principle of Arab unity. Nevertheless, her relations with other members of the Arab League were a sad reflection on Arab solidarity. As the self-appointed champion of Arab orthodoxy, the President's attitude to Iraq and Jordan was affected by what he regarded as the British occupation of these countries. Relations with Iraq were consistently bad. The Iraq Government had granted asylum to Colonel Safa after the



events of December 1952. The President seemed convinced that the Iraqis, with British connivance, were encouraging Safa and fostering a Free Syrian Movement aimed at unseating the present régime and bringing about a union between Syria and Iraq. Relations with the Lebanon were be-  
 devilled by economic friction. In spite of negotiations aimed at achieving an economic union between the two countries, no progress was made during 1953 and commercial relations continued to be governed by a temporary agreement extended from time to time. The Saudi Arabian Government was regarded with some suspicion as being in league with some of the Syrian Opposition parties. Only with Egypt were relations normal and friendly, probably due to the similarity of the two régimes.

12. In view of Syria's uneasy relations with the Arab States generally and with Turkey over Hatay, it is not surprising that the President should have seized the opportunity afforded by the opening of Parliament to remind the country that Syria was a Mediterranean, as well as an Arab, country, and to make friendly references to Spain, France and Italy.

13. The Palestine question, which took on a more serious aspect towards the end of the year, was necessarily reflected in the Syrian attitude towards the three Western Powers. There was a stream of criticism in the press, aimed more particularly at the United States and ourselves as the foster-parents of Zionism and Israel. This in its turn prevented any improvement in Syrian-United States relations which might have been expected to result from the visit of Mr. Dulles during the summer. Hostility to the Americans and their Western partners did not, however, produce any perceptible change in the reserved attitude of Syria towards the Soviet Union, although Soviet stock undoubtedly rose after the veto of the tripartite resolution on the Jordan waters dispute in the Security Council.

14. Anglo-Syrian relations were overshadowed not only by Palestine but also by our alleged position of influence in, and so-called "colonisation" of, other Arab States. The press kept up its attacks on British policy and inevitably sided with those who, like Mau-Mau, were trying to escape from the yoke of the "coloniser." Paradoxically enough, there was some improvement in Anglo-Syrian relations during the second half of the year, despite the unpropitious atmosphere. The Syrians agreed not to give effect to the boycott notice they had

served on Imperial Chemical Industries (Limited), boycott measures imposed on two British ships at Lattakia were removed, arrangements went forward for the signature of an Anglo-Syrian Air Convention and negotiations took place for the sale to Syria of radar equipment and the supply of Meteor jet night-fighter aircraft. These signs of growing friendship result from our policy of giving limited help to Syria to build up her armed forces. In particular, the present régime now looks to us to supply the aircraft and equipment which are essential if the Syrian Air Force is to be developed according to plan. The delivery of further aircraft during the year and the provision of courses in the United Kingdom for Syrian pilots and technicians has undoubtedly improved our position here. But, in addition to this, there are signs that Shishakli may be moving very gradually towards a cautious co-operation with the West, always provided that he does not become entangled in military alliances and can receive economic and other aid on his own terms.

15. Underpinning the improvement in Anglo-Syrian relations is the healthy state of trade between the two countries. The Syrian economy has continued sound throughout 1953 and, in spite of new trade agreements signed with other countries, we remained one of Syria's best customers, particularly for agricultural products. The visit of the United Kingdom trade mission in December received considerable publicity, its members were cordially received and a basis of goodwill was laid for the expansion of trade relations.

16. In spite of the xenophobic tone of the press, the difficulties which beset relations between Syria and the West and the outward manifestations of a police State, the British visitor to Syria in 1953 could hardly have failed to be impressed by the personal friendliness with which he was welcomed and by the signs of prosperity and material progress surrounding him. He would no doubt have admired the sturdy independence of a country still suffering acutely from the growing pains of nationhood, and the economic and social progress which is being made despite heavy military expenditure. The work on the port of Lattakia and the Ghab Valley development scheme were both put in hand during the year and, although much which is beyond the slender resources of Syria remains to be done, there is clear evidence of Syria's determination to become, politically and economically, a

force to be reckoned with in Middle East affairs. The credit is due in large measure to the President who, despite his failings and the vicissitudes of the past year, has been the driving force behind his country's progress and an increasingly dominating influence in Middle East affairs.

17. I am sending copies of this despatch to Her Majesty's Ambassadors at Amman, Beirut, Bagdad, Cairo, Jedda and Tel Aviv, to the Head of the British Middle East Office, to Her Majesty's Consul-General at Jerusalem and Her Majesty's Consul at Aleppo.

I have, &c.

A. J. GARDENER.

#### Annex

#### *Chronological Summary of the Principal Events of 1953*

- January.*—Following the failure of their coup in December 1952, Hourani, leader of the Arab Socialist Party and Bitar and Aflaq, leaders of the Ba'ath Party, took refuge in the Lebanon.
- February 2.*—Syrians proposed in Syrian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission that the whole frontier should be demarcated.
- March 4.*—Publication of new Army Law.
- March 10.*—Removal of ban on import of products of I.C.I., Limited, imposed by the Boycott Office in February because of the Company's investments in Israel.
- March 25.*—Instruments of Ratification of the six-months Syro-Lebanese Temporary Economic Agreement exchanged at Beirut.
- March 28.*—New Monetary Law providing for the establishment of a government Central Bank and other regulations was issued.
- April 15-23.*—State visit of the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, now King Saud.
- May 21.*—Announcement of a new tribal law designed to bring the Bedouin under closer supervision.
- May 15.*—Official visit of Mr. Dulles and Mr. Stassen.
- May 21.*—Budget for 1953 published amounting to £Syr. 205 million.
- May 21.*—The Minister for Foreign Affairs handed Her Majesty's Ambassador a strong Note of protest about the references to Israel contained in Sir Winston Churchill's speech of May 11.
- May 24.*—Signature of Syro-Iranian Treaty of Friendship.
- June 2.*—Syrian Foreign Minister headed Syrian delegation at Coronation of Her Majesty The Queen.
- July 4.*—Signature of Syro-Jordanian agreement on the Yarmuk Project (ratified on July 7).
- June 8.*—Signature of commercial agreement with Japan (Instruments of Ratification exchanged in Cairo on August 1).
- June 19.*—General Shishakli opened the Damascus Centre of the Arab Liberation Movement.
- June 21.*—Draft of new Constitution proclaimed.
- July 10.*—The electorate approved the new Constitution and elected General Shishakli as President.
- July 19.*—President Shishakli, in accordance with the new Constitution, nominated his Ministers. Brigadier Shuqair appointed Chief of Staff.

*July 30.*—Publication of new electoral law.

*August 13.*—Syro-Lebanese Temporary Economic Agreement extended for a further six months with effect from September 28.

*September 2.*—Israelis began work in the demilitarised zone to divert water from the Jordan. Syria protested to the United Nations Chief of Staff.

*September 9.*—Syria signed the Inter-Arab States Economic Convention at Cairo.

*September 9.*—The Syrian Government guaranteed a loan of £Syr. 25 million to the Administration of the Ghab project.

*September 9.*—Syrian press delegation left for United Kingdom.

*September 12.*—Publication of law permitting the formation of political parties under certain conditions. Only two small parties applied for registration.

*September 23.*—General Bennike called on the Israelis to stop work on the Jordan waters diversion scheme pending an agreement.

*September 25.*—The contract for the preliminary work for the Ghab Drainage project awarded to a Yugoslav Company "Trudbenik."

*September 26.*—The Syrian Government asked the Tripartite Governments to support General Bennike's ruling of September 23.

*September 29.*—Representatives of the Tripartite Governments in Damascus indicated to the Syrian Government their countries' support.

*October 3.*—Minister of Interior resigned in protest against Government manipulation of the elections.

*October 9.*—General election at which President Shishakli's Arab Liberation Movement gained at least sixty of the eighty-two seats.

*October 12.*—Publication of a new Press Law designed to improve quality and control numbers of papers.

*October 12.*—Syria brought to the attention of Security Council the Israeli refusal to comply with General Bennike's ruling on the Jordan waters.

*October 16.*—Hourani and the two leaders of the Ba'ath Party, who fled the country in January, returned to Syria.

*October 18.*—Syrian Army alerted and two-thirds of its strength sent to the Israeli front.

*October 24.*—President Shishakli opened Parliament.

*October 30.*—Mr. Johnston, President Eisenhower's emissary, visited Damascus to discuss the T.V.A. plan for distribution of the Jordan waters with the Syrian Government.

*November 5-7.*—Middle East anti-locust conference held in Damascus.

*November 18.*—President Shishakli asked representatives of Tripartite powers for full support for Syria's case in Jordan waters dispute.

*November 19-21.*—Visit of Admiral Wright, the Commander-in-Chief of the United States Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean Fleets.

*December 3.*—Syrian National Day celebrated with military parade.

*December 4.*—Arab Liberation Movement registered as a political party and President Shishakli re-elected leader of the Movement.

*December 8-16.*—British Trade Mission to the Middle East visited Damascus and Aleppo.

*December 8-11.*—Student demonstrations in Aleppo and Damascus.

*December 21.*—Colonel Ibrahim Husseini, Director-General of Police and Security, appointed Military Attaché in Washington.

*December 27.*—Parliament approved a budget of £Syr. 208 million for 1954.



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No. 6

## RESIGNATION OF M. YAFI'S GOVERNMENT

*Sir Edwin Chapman-Andrews to Mr. Eden. (Received February 27)*

(No. 44. Confidential)

Beirut,  
February 24, 1954.

Sir,

I have the honour to report that M. Yafi has again tendered the resignation of his Government to the President who has this time accepted it. The President's refusal to accept M. Yafi's resignation on February 16 (reported in my telegram No. 77) was intended to give time for an effort at Lebanese mediation between Syria and Iraq, though why President Chamoun should have gone to such lengths as sending his Prime Minister to see Shishakly and asking the Iraqi Prime Minister to fly urgently to Beirut, is not clear. In any case the busy-body effort failed.

2. M. Yafi's late Government has been in power since August 17, 1953. It started off with a programme more coherent and thought-out than is usually the case here, but in the event it proved to be much like its predecessors. In the opening session in September the Government obtained a majority of 31 to 4 after a dignified and quite impressive debate on its programme. By December the majority had fallen to 13 and, in the final division last week, to 2. True, the Prime Minister, only a week or so earlier, won the solid support of the Chamber in his demand for revision of the transit agreement with the Iraq Petroleum Company, but this signified no more than the unanimous desire to obtain "more money for oil." The steady decrease in the Government's majority reflected increasing lack of confidence in its ability to carry through its programme, particularly on the economic side. The Government could claim to have negotiated an out-of-court settlement of the dispute with the Electricity Company, but it failed to ensure sufficient supplies of electricity to avoid power cuts; similarly, while it admittedly did not lose its head over the threat of an economic crisis last autumn, it displayed lamentable incompetence on the reform of import licensing procedure and in the price revision of pharmaceutical supplies. Although the programme held out hopes of industrial and hydro-electrical development, better credit facilities, and the encouragement of foreign investment, little was done to fulfil them. The administration remained in a chaotic state, an indication of which was the failure to pass the Budget for 1953 until November.

3. In foreign affairs the Lebanon continued under M. Yafi's Government to maintain good relations with the West while keeping up the appearance of being good Arabs by assiduous and prolonged attendance at Arab League meetings. The Government failed to agree among themselves on policy aims in their economic negotiations with Syria; and suffered a rebuff last week when the Prime Minister offered to mediate between Syria and Iraq. The Lebanon kept discreetly in line with Arab opinion generally in regard to Israel and maintained unanimity with fellow members of the Arab League over the Qibya incident, Jordan waters (including the Johnston plan), and the revision of the Jordan Armistice agreement. In an effort to adjust the adverse balance of trade, the Government continued the policy of securing bi-lateral trade agreements, one being signed with East Germany in December and negotiations for another started with the U.S.S.R.

4. The problem of Cabinet making in the Lebanon is always difficult as there are no parties in the usual sense of the word and the "confessional" system imposes a rigid sectarian pattern on the composition of any Government. Freedom of choice is therefore always restricted. But in the present instance this difficulty is being intensified by the President's half measures over Constitutional reform, and he and the country are now paying the price for reducing the size of the Chamber from 77 to 44, without simultaneously adopting the complementary project of creating a second, nominated, Chamber of 22. The President's original intention was that the two Houses should normally sit together. Such a legislature would have provided not only greater stability and a wider scope for the choice of Ministers, but would also have brought to the councils of Parliament many able and experienced men who either no longer desire to fight for a seat at the hustings or for whom a place could not in any case be found owing to the rigidity of the

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electoral system, which is also designed to produce a balanced representation of the sects as well as of the territorial Constituencies. Of the 44 members of the present Chamber there are few occasions when more than 34 are present together. Of these during the late Government 8 sat on the Government bench with the result that the Government supporters on the floor of the House were usually no more than 9 or 10, and in fact at the final division last week, which compelled the Prime Minister to accept what was tantamount to defeat, the victorious Opposition numbered no more than 16. This reduces Parliamentary Government to something near an absurdity as the President himself now seems to realise.

5. The final attack on the Government was organised and led by the Maronite deputy from the Shouf, Emile Bustani. This is the first time M. Bustani has played a dominating role in the political affairs of this country, and it is by no means a good augury. For one thing, being a Maronite, he cannot under the present system lead a Government, unless like the Duke of Plazatoro he should do so from behind. But this he would not by nature be inclined to do, and he has more than once declared in private his resolution never to accept Government office. In brief, his interventions in Parliament, where his attendance is by no means regular owing to his varied, vast and widespread business commitments, have taken on a strong colour of irresponsibility. During recent weeks he has been gunning for the Maronite Minister of Finance, M. Pierre Eddé, and has made no secret of his determination to hound him out of the Government, nor of his readiness to support (for the time being at least), M. Yafi if he will form another Government omitting him. This the Prime Minister, strongly backed by the President, has shown himself most reluctant to do, partly because the Minister of Finance has just put the finishing touches to his Budget, already 2 months overdue, and partly because M. Eddé is a close personal friend of the President, the two having sat together, sometimes almost alone, on the Opposition bench for some four years during the previous régime. It is possible that the President may persuade M. Bustani not to press for the time being his insistent objections to M. Eddé. That is the main issue. Thus the struggle is, as always in the Lebanon on final analysis, one of personalities. In it, however, the prestige of the President of the Republic has suffered a further decline. The turn of events in Parliament took him by surprise, and when I saw him the following day he was obviously badly shaken. His desire to retain M. Yafi even in the face of the latter's wish to resign is understandable, but his efforts to do so, combined with his partiality towards M. Eddé and the vacillations of the past week, ending with his acceptance of M. Yafi's resignation, have been taken by many people as yet another example of President Chamoun's most manifest weakness, namely indecision. This is particularly unfortunate because of the very nature of the Lebanese Constitution which has placed exceedingly wide powers in the hands of the President of the Republic. The probability is that M. Yafi will be called upon to form the next Government but, if so, it is not known to what extent it will be composed of extra-Parliamentary figures. If, as seems probable, some are included, M. Yafi's parliamentary position will, in my opinion, be weaker rather than the contrary because most members are opposed to the principle of the thing and M. Yafi in particular has so declared himself in the past. It therefore seems to me unlikely that the next Government, no matter who should head it or how it should be composed, will last long.

6. I am sending copies of this despatch to Her Majesty's Representatives at Amman, Baghdad, Cairo and Damascus, and to the Head of the British Middle East Office at Fayid.

I have, &amp;c.

E. A. CHAPMAN-ANDREWS.

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VY 1016/56

No. 7

### ARMY OPPOSITION TO THE RULE OF COLONEL SHISHAKLY

*From Her Majesty's Consul. (Received February 26)*

(No. 1. Restricted)  
(Telegraphic)

*Aleppo,  
February 26, 1954.*

Today February 25, at 9:00 [group undecipherable] Chief of Staff Northern area Syrian army [group undecipherable Has] sal Attassi asked all Consuls to visit him at 1000 hours.

2. I attended with Consular colleague and he read to us statement, of which the following is the gist.

3. The Syrian army in the areas of Aleppo, Latakia, Deir Az Zor, Hassetche, Homs and Hama has decided to declare its opposition to the rule of Colonel Shishakly in order to preserve the *status quo* in the country. It will return to its barracks when it has performed its military duty without interfering in the administration of the area, leaving to the nation charge of its administrative and political affairs in accordance with the will of the people and democratic principles. Army in these areas will keep order and protect persons and property, and civil administration and courts in the areas will continue functioning in accordance with laws in force. We assure representatives of friendly nations that the army has no personal interest or political aspirations in the matter. It is acting in response to the will of the people with the sole object of protecting the liberty of the country, its independence, sovereignty and security. The movement is internal only and in no way affects Syria's foreign relations nor its international undertakings, which will be respected.

4. The statement is signed "Headquarters Northern Area" and also by the Eastern, Western and Central areas.

5. Meanwhile the former army Commanders of the Northern area of Muhafiz are under house arrest. Apart from the attempt by small crowd to burn the headquarters of the Liberation Party and a few anti-Shishakly student demonstrations, the town is quiet but apprehensive. All communication with Damascus is interrupted.

6. When asked if he was at the head of the movement Attassi replied "Yes in this area, but I am not alone and have the support of five other areas."

VY 1016/75

No. 8

### INTERNATIONAL REACTIONS TO THE FALL OF COLONEL SHISHAKLY

*Mr. Gardener to Mr. Eden. (Received March 1)*

(No. 117)  
(Telegraphic)

*Damascus,  
March 1, 1954.*

Reactions to recent events, of Damascus representatives of countries chiefly concerned with Syria, appear to be as follows:—

*United States.*—Sincerely regret Shishakly's departure. Despite his obvious failings he is considered to have preserved the country from political and economic disorders.

*France.*—Greatly regret Shishakly's departure *inter alia* because Shishakly and his military followers were closer to France (because of French cultural background and French supply of arms) than civilian politicians are likely to be. Furthermore, France fear that union with Iraq (and hence the diminution of French influence) has been brought nearer. Beirut Press quotes selected French newspapers as hinting at British instigation. The French Minister of Defence returning from Indo-China is unexpectedly breaking his journey here.

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*Turkey.*—The Turkish Chargé d'Affaires expressed the provisional view that the new régime, possibly comparable with Iraq, would be in Turkish interests.

*Saudi Arabia.*—The Ambassador was downcast even before the newspapers published the text of the telegram alleged to have been sent by Atassi to the Saudi Arabian Government and the Embassy sharply protesting at the reception by the Saudi Arabian Government of a "man who is not a statesman but a common criminal." The Egyptian Ambassador told the United States Ambassador that the Saudi Arabian Embassy here had paid £30,000 to pro-Shishakly elements during the *coup d'état* to continue the resistance.

*Iraq* is poorly represented here by a low power Chargé d'Affaires who appears to think that the union is certain and imminent.

2. Lebanon and Jordan have no representatives here. The Egyptian Ambassador was chiefly interested in the resignation of his brother, Mohammed Neguib.

VY 1016/85

No. 9

### HER MAJESTY'S AMBASSADOR'S ANALYSIS OF THE EVENTS IN SYRIA WHICH BROUGHT ABOUT THE RESIGNATION OF PRESIDENT SHISHAKLY AND HIS SUGGESTIONS AS TO WHAT THE CHARACTER OF THE NEW RÉGIME MAY PROVE TO BE

*Mr. Gardener to Mr. Eden. (Received March 13)*

(No. 46. Confidential) *Damascus,  
Sir, March 8, 1954.*

I have already reported by telegram that on the morning of the 25th of February the army in the north of Syria declared itself in revolt against President Shishakly, that the President resigned that same evening and that three days of confusion ensued until the new President, Hashim Atassi, came to Damascus on the 1st of March and announced his Cabinet. I now have the honour to try to analyse these events and to suggest what the character of the new régime may prove to be.

2. In paragraph 12 of my despatch No. 29 of the 9th of February I concluded that so long as Shishakly controlled the army he would remain master of the country and that if he were to die suddenly the army would be the arbiter of the position. What happened was in many ways equivalent to the sudden death of Shishakly. It looks as though he committed political suicide through a sudden loss of nerve on the first occasion on which he was seriously challenged by elements in the army.

3. The origins of the revolution are still not entirely clear, probably because they were general, not particular causes. As I reported, it was obvious that there was a lot of discontent in the country which seemed to be particularly connected with the town of Homs. Shishakly's firm measures left the régime just where it was

before. On the one hand he had obviously reasserted his practical control of the country and proved that the army was prepared to accept his orders even to the extent of firing on fellow-Syrians. On the other hand his measures provoked a great deal of bitterness and revealed that his régime depended entirely upon his control of the army. Probably Shishakly miscalculated the extent to which the army could be held to be separate from the civilian population. There are a limited number of families in Syria which by tradition and wealth expect to have a share in the government of the country. It frequently happens that a member of one of these families, who are closely connected by marriage, will be an army officer while another may be a politician. The most notable example of this is that the head of the well-known Homs family from which the ostensible leader of the revolution in Aleppo, Colonel Faisal Atassi, comes, is Hashim Atassi, the new President of the Republic. It is possible that Shishakly, himself an upstart from an insignificant family, may not have appreciated the depth of feeling he aroused among army officers by arresting their friends and relations. Still more serious were his arrests of army officers and their capricious banishment to outlying parts of the country. Indeed, the number of disaffected army officers sent against their will to posts in the north was probably of distinct benefit to the leaders of the revolt.

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4. Moreover, Shishakli's firm, not to say brutal, suppression of the Druze revealed not only the very general opposition to his régime which existed, but also the extent to which he was prepared to go in crushing it. The killing and looting which took place seriously damaged his reputation. Another aspect of Shishakli's repressive methods, and one which was most commented upon, was that he was going too far. Syrians are used to the arrest of politicians—there are people who might consider it beneficial to the country—but to keep on arresting persons, students as well as politicians, and to apply third degree methods to them is going beyond the bounds of decency in politics as Syrians recognise it. If the régime, though long established, still found it necessary to practise and even to increase such drastic action there was no telling where it would end and who would be the next victim. The fact that Shishakli was efficient only made the situation worse.

5. These vague rebellious feelings, coupled with the inherent love of Syrians for intrigue and political change, seem to have been the somewhat amorphous driving forces behind the revolution. At least, had there been a well-laid nation-wide plot I should have expected its leaders to emerge clearly and for there to have been less dithering after Shishakli's resignation. If my surmise is correct the revolt appears as a most hazardous enterprise, conducted largely without planning (in order to avoid the risk of leakage to Shishakli's secret police), and without the force to back it up. That it succeeded was astonishing and was almost entirely due to Shishakli's loss of nerve. The long period during which he has lived in fear of his life, the knowledge of the recurrent plots against his régime, and the possibility that he might be involving the country in a civil war may have at last sapped his strong will. A brief description of the course of the revolution will, I think, show the almost identical character of the revolt, the confusion which it brought about and the uncertain prospects of the new régime.

6. On the night of the 24th-25th February Colonel Faisal Atassi, second in command of the army at Aleppo, arrested his chief and sent an ultimatum to President Shishakli demanding his resignation. This was announced on Aleppo Radio on the morning of the 25th of February by the two officers who seem to have been the principal architects of the revolt, Captain Hamdoun

and Captain Malki; and before the day was out all the remaining army commanders in Homs and the north had declared their support for the revolt and appealed to their comrades in the south. The commanders of certain units in the south whom Shishakli ordered to march north refused on the grounds that they would not fight other members of the Syrian army. At 9 p.m. that evening, President Shishakli resigned and fled to Beirut. Almost immediately it transpired that the commanders of the Qabboun armoured depot near Damascus, in whose hands the bulk of the tanks and self-propelled guns were, strongly supported Shishakli. It was evident that the President had resigned too precipitately, and the course of events suggests that had he returned and taken command in Damascus any time up to midnight on Saturday, 27th February, he might well have regained his position. However, as Her Majesty's Ambassador at Beirut has reported in his telegram No 114 of the 27th of February to you the Lebanese authorities prevented this.

7. The situation on the 26th and 27th of February was extremely confused and wide open to anyone who had some force and the initiative to use it. The army groups in the north who had begun the revolt were so scattered and weak that they did not dare to march on Damascus. Instead, their leaders gathered at Homs, the home of the aged Hashim Atassi, whom they proposed to reinstate in his position as President of the Republic from which he had been ousted by Shishakli in December 1951. Most of the politicians who had been released from prison near Damascus in the early stages of the revolt also gathered in Homs. Damascus itself was held by the pro-Shishakli armoured units, whose leaders declared for the maintenance of the 1953 constitution and therefore supported Kuzbari, the President of Parliament, as the legal Acting President of the Republic. The Chief of Staff, who quickly found himself without practical authority, lent his name in support of this group. However, the leaders of the armoured units were curiously hesitant, and did not use their tanks to show that they meant business. In the event the key to the situation fell into the hands of the bulk of the army which was stationed on the frontiers south of Damascus.

8. After some hesitation the army in the south declared in favour of the north. The position of the armoured units in Damascus,

in the absence of a resolute leader, then became hopeless, and on Saturday, the 27th of February, they laid down their arms. An anti-Shishakli mob stormed Parliament which immediately declared its own dissolution, Kuzbari resigned, rioting broke out in Damascus and the Chief of Staff went to Homs for consultation with the Northern Army leaders, Hashim Atassi and the other politicians. He returned to Damascus early on the morning of the 28th of February and announced that Hashim Atassi had resumed the office of President and that he would shortly come to Damascus. That evening small groups of Communists carried out carefully planned demonstrations which, with the aid of the mob, soon deteriorated into serious riots. They were severely repressed by the police with considerable casualties. Though these riots were certainly serious, it looks as though the Communists missed a bigger chance by not acting earlier.

9. On the afternoon of the 1st of March the new President entered Damascus. Since then there has been no serious incident though the atmosphere is still uneasy.

10. Of the new Cabinet which was officially announced on the evening of the 1st March only the Prime Minister is a politician of the first rank. The reason for the abstention of other prominent politicians was probably the fear that membership of this admittedly Caretaker Cabinet would prejudice their chances later. The declared object of the new Government is to carry out free parliamentary elections. It has been officially announced that the 1950 Constitution, under which Hashim Atassi was elected President of the Republic, and which Shishakli abrogated is again in force. The Prime Minister has said that: "The new Parliament will be given the right to modify the Constitution as it wishes within a period of three months."

11. It is easy enough to make sweeping statements, but the Government is now obliged to cope with the practical implications. If the 1950 Constitution has all along been the only legitimate basis of government what is to be done about the mass of legislation promulgated under Shishakli's régime? A committee of experts has been set up under the chairmanship of the Minister of Justice to examine this problem. Likewise does the annulment of Shishakli's régime mean the recall of the Parliament which he dissolved? Whatever the answer to these two legalistic questions

may be, one of the first practical actions of the new Government was the immediate abolition of permits for travel between Syria and the Lebanon. This was a popular action which emphasised the general feeling that Shishakli had impeded the ideal of Arab unity and that the new régime will be favourable to it.

12. It is still too early to predict the course of the new régime or to discern accurately what its policies will be. The present state of affairs, however, does not give the impression of real stability. It looks as though Syria is embarking upon a game of political roulette in which chance plays a large part and unexpected combinations may turn up at any time. There are, however, two aspects of the present situation to which I should like to draw particular attention. The first is the increase in the strength of the Left wing in Syria. In paragraph 6 of my annual review for 1953 I said that "the Communist and Left-wing parties have been able to assume the mantle of the would-be liberator and to attract the votes, if not the whole-hearted support, of many Syrians who want to express their opposition to the régime but are completely ignorant of, or untouched by, the ideological basis of communism." Whether or not the Left-wing leaders retain all their anti-Shishakli support they will now have a larger field for manoeuvre. It will, I imagine, be difficult to keep Akram Haurani, the main Left-wing leader and one of the most astute and able men in Syria, out of office should he desire to come in. He appears to have a relatively efficient organisation at his command and influence with the mobs and amongst the students who unfortunately play a significant rôle in Syrian politics. It may also be of considerable significance that several of the army leaders in the north who instigated the revolt are known for their Left-wing tendencies. Several of these officers and others of pronounced Left-wing views, who are now being reinstated in the army after being retired by Shishakli will certainly hold important military posts from which they might be able to conduct yet another *coup d'Etat*. Beyond the eventual achievement of power, it is doubtful what Haurani's real aims are, but it is virtually certain that he would be antagonistic towards us.

13. The second feature of the situation which I wish to stress is the likelihood that the question of union with Iraq will again be prominent in Syrian politics. At present



it seems probable that the Populist advocates of union will propose to advance in stages, but this Fabian approach is unlikely seriously to modify the opposition to the scheme. Haurani is bitterly opposed to the idea and, instead, favours a Greater Syria union, the effect of which would be to annex Lebanon and Jordan to Syria, and also to recover the Sanjak of Alexandretta from Turkey. Whatever we may do or say Syrians will continue to believe that Britain controls Iraqi policy. The emergence of the question of union with Iraq will therefore be certain to involve us in Syrian minds with the internal politics of Syria.

14. There is a third aspect of the situation which may later be of importance. That is the attitude of the army. It is amazing that a revolution carried out by the army should have produced no outstanding military personality anxious for power. Even Colonel Faisal Atassi, the ostensible leader of the plot, returned to command the troops in Aleppo without making any further claim for himself or his followers. For the first time since March 1949 the politicians are in control, albeit precariously, of the situation. Syrian memories for benefits received are short, but it may not be long before some of the army leaders begin to remember that they were better off under a military dictatorship than under a civilian régime. The enormous military budget is likely to be cut and this may remind them how easy the army found it to overthrow the politicians. If such memories again become uppermost it is even possible, as it is certainly feared by some, that General Shishakli might be brought back to lead a new military régime. More probable is a connexion between the army and the Left wing led by Haurani. Taking advantage of the discontent which the military may feel at a future loss of privilege Haurani may be successful in fostering Left-wing sympathies in the army with the

result that the military leaders may be able to bring about the emergence of a Left-wing Government, either by a show of force or simply by rigging the elections.

15. The future is so uncertain that it is not yet possible to discern what the attitude of the new régime towards ourselves will be. Presumably a civilian government will not so closely relate their attitude to the Western Powers to the supply of arms as did Shishakli's régime. Except among the Left wing there is a general but vague feeling in favour of the West and some genuine desire to be friendly. However, in the present confused and kaleidoscopic prospect it looks as though the door will be open to all sorts of influences, among them Saudi gold and Soviet propaganda. Probably the chief support of our position in Syria will, in view of human and especially Arab regard for strength, continue to be our special status in Iraq and Jordan which the Syrians interpret as one of control. As in the past this special status angered General Shishakli, who regarded it as being behind the Iraqi threat to Syrian independence and as an obstacle to his own design of union with Jordan, so in the future it will inevitably lead to friction with one or other of the Syrian political parties, each of whom have their own hopes and fears of union with Iraq and Jordan. Furthermore, the Left wing are likely to dislike us and our special position in neighbouring countries in any case. Thus whatever Government is in power irritation with us may well continue alongside respect for our position of strength in neighbouring countries.

16. I am sending copies of this despatch to Her Majesty's Ambassadors at Amman, Bagdad, Beirut, Cairo, Jedda, Ankara and Tel Aviv, and to the Head of the British Middle East Office.

I have, &c.

A. J. GARDENER.

V 1054/4

No. 10

## POLITICAL SITUATION

*Mr. Gardener to the British Middle East Office. (Received March 9)*

(No. 135. Confidential)

Damascus,

(Telegraphic)

March 9, 1954.

Your telegram No. 141 to Foreign Office.

In Syria the political situation is still confused. There is much talk of union with Iraq or Jordan in the air and our support for one or other of the forms of unity is sought. The Left-wing groups are organising in readiness for elections and also to penetrate the army. Moreover, we are credited by some Syrian groups with having engineered the overthrow of Shishakli, while the French suspect us of the same deed in order to promote unity with Iraq and so undermine their "special position" which has been useful to them in the past in silencing criticism of their position in North Africa.

I therefore fear that any statement made by Her Majesty's Government however couched will be interpreted by one or more of the different parties to suit their own views. I fear in this way the present confusion may be increased rather than diminished.

We can, however, discuss the matter when you visit us shortly.

VY 1016/9

No. 11

## REPORT ON THE NEW GOVERNMENT OF ABDULLA YAFI

*Sir Edwin Chapman-Andrews to Mr. Eden. (Received March 13)*

(No. 54. Confidential)

Beirut,

Sir,

March 11, 1954.

With reference to my telegram No. 119 I have the honour to report that Abdulla Yafi's new Government was given a vote of confidence after a three-hour debate in the Chamber on March 5. The vote was 23 to 8 with 3 abstentions, 10 deputies being absent. This result gives the appearance of more solid support than the Government can really count on, for as one Opposition paper put it, Yafi may have the confidence of 23 deputies including the members of his own Government, but he has lost the confidence of the great majority of Lebanese. This is not surprising considering that the new Government is the same as the old except for two changes, neither of which can inspire any confidence as a change for the better.

2. In fact we now have a compromise Government formed only after protracted consultation and at least two false starts. The President of the Republic was restricted, by the exigencies of Lebanese Constitutional convention, to a choice between the two leading Sunni deputies, Abdullah Yafi or Sami Solh. As His Excellency himself confided to me, he would call upon the latter only with reluctance and in the last resort. Though the President did not say so, Sami Solh enjoys the reputation of clinging so obstinately to office that when he is finally dislodged he is inclined to bring the President down with him. At all events on February 27, four days after Yafi's resignation, it looked for a moment as though the revolution and consequent uncertainties in Syria might serve to rally politicians here in support of a "Government of national concentration" a strong team of ten, which included Pierre Eddé, the Minister of Finance, whom the Opposition had previously sworn to get rid of, and Hamid Frangieh, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and runner-up in September 1952 for the Presidency of the Republic. The following day Frangieh went back on his acceptance of the Ministry of the Interior, while Emile Bustani and his Opposition group had reaffirmed intractable opposition to the inclusion of Pierre Eddé. At a dinner that night at the Presidency, to which I had the honour of being invited together with several of the leading politicians, it seemed to be generally agreed between the latter that only Sami Solh could form a Government which would command a sure majority. Nevertheless the President decided to make one final attempt at a Yafi reshuffle. This succeeded but only at the cost of dropping Eddé. With him went one other, namely Bechir Awar. One of the



two vacancies has been filled by the Druze feudal chieftain and friend of the former President, the Emir Megid Arslan, and the other by a new and untried Minister, a Maronite from the Bekaa, Georges Hraoui, who surprisingly enough has been given the Ministry of the Interior. The Prime Minister has retained for himself the portfolios of Finance and Information.

3. Without waiting for the Chamber to reassemble the Prime Minister publicly announced that the main item in his new programme would be electoral reform, to secure an increase in the number of deputies, and in the debate on March 5 when the Government was accorded the vote of confidence this declaration was generally welcomed. The Prime Minister told me the following day that his intention was to secure the passage of a law increasing the number of deputies from 44 to 77. This, however, would mean a frank return to the Chamber of the previous régime and would be a tacit but thoroughgoing admission of the failure of President Chamoun's original project of electoral reform, the project on which he had set to work with such enthusiasm on his accession to power. There can be no doubt that, courageous and even necessary as this step might be, the prestige of the President will suffer a further setback and cause an increase in the number throughout the country of those who declare that nothing since the old days has been changed for the better. Moreover, as the Prime Minister observed to me, the Constitution provides for a deputy to be elected for four years unless Parliament should be dissolved sooner, except where a vacancy shall have arisen requiring a by-election. Thus a change in the electoral law such as that now envisaged would appear to necessitate the subsequent dissolution of Parliament and new general elections. But as the Prime Minister observed, the country is not prepared for this only six months after the last general elections, and indeed there might be therein a considerable risk to public security. The Prime Minister was therefore inclined to try and devise means of holding what he called subsidiary elections, though he admitted that he would have to consult the jurists about the constitutional aspect.

4. If therefore the Prime Minister should have his way and find some means satisfactory to the jurists (and in the Lebanon all such things are possible) of pouring new wine into the old bottle in the proportions of three of the new to four of the old, he may well come to regret it. The bottle itself, true to form, may not be able to stand it, and the cry may be raised that the Chamber and all its acts are unconstitutional, with the result that Yafi may create for himself the reputation of being an unconstitutional Prime Minister, a label that might well stick to him and discredit him long afterwards. For the moment, however, this problem is not in the forefront of most people's minds.

5. Apart from electoral reform, the Government is pledged to review the immunities at present enjoyed by the Bench and the Civil Service, and to reform these services; to decentralise the Administration still further and to pay special attention to the development of public utilities. The Council for Economic Development, already in existence, will work out an overall plan to raise the standard of living by increasing production and organising a stable basis for it. This presumably is a reference to the National Bank project and to other plans for attracting foreign capital and encouraging private investment in approved enterprises. It is hoped that "economic union" with Syria (*scilicet* on terms favourable to the Lebanon) will be achieved. Finally there is the usual high-sounding intention to maintain public order and the rule of law.

6. Estimates vary of the expectation of life of this Government. The Speaker told me last night he thought that it might be two or three months, long enough to get the Budget through. He admitted, however, that it might be only two or three weeks. In other words, this Government exists on sufferance and the fact is well understood by all the newspapers, one of which, however, has vouchsafed that it will "forgive the Government everything" if it succeeds in getting "more money from oil."

7. I am sending copies of this despatch to Her Majesty's Representatives at Amman, Baghdad, Cairo, Damascus, Jedda, Tel Aviv, Paris and Washington, and to the Head of the British Middle East Office at Fayid.

I have, &c.

E. A. CHAPMAN-ANDREWS.

VY 1017/3

No. 12

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SYRIAN INTERNAL SITUATION

*Mr. Gardener to Mr. Eden. (Received March 22)*

(No. 52. Confidential)

*Damascus,*

Sir,

*March 16, 1954.*

The developments in the internal situation in Syria which have occurred since my despatch No. 46 of the 8th of March, have been mainly of a constitutional and administrative character.

2. The most notable event of the last week has been the recall of the 1949 Parliament. This Parliament has had a chequered career. It came into being in November 1949 with elections for the Constituent Assembly which were boycotted by the Nationalist Party. Consequently the Assembly which emerged was largely Populist, and it elected Hashim Atassi as Head of State. On the 5th of September, 1950, Syria received her "new look"; the new Constitution came into force, Hashim Atassi was elected President of the Republic and the Constituent Assembly, in accordance with Article 164 of the Constitution which it had itself framed, became the Syrian Parliament. It was this régime, abolished by Shishakli in December 1951, which has now been restored, temporarily at least, lock, stock and barrel. Nazim Qudsi, the Speaker, invited all the surviving members of the 1949 Parliament, with the exception of those who had also sat in Shishakli's Parliament, to reassemble on the afternoon of the 15th of March.

3. The sitting began with the reading of the minutes of the last session in 1951 and continued with the announcement of the resignation in December 1951 of Dawalibi's short-lived Government, a resignation which was accepted on the 1st of March this year. The opening speech by the Speaker and the Prime Minister's statement of policy which followed were both tuned to this same key. The Speaker spoke of the illegal and dictatorial character of the régime which had just been overthrown, and explained that the Chamber had recovered its complete constitutional authority in accordance with Article 41 of the 1950 Constitution which states that this would be the case if elections were not held within sixty days of a dissolution.

4. The Prime Minister declared that the policy of his Government had a twofold basis, complete freedom and respect for the law. His Government, which recognised itself as being a transitional one, would ensure that free elections were held about the middle of June. His Government would propose, for the consideration of the new Parliament, certain constitutional amendments dealing with the balance of power between the executive authority and the legislature. Already the new Government had submitted a Bill separating the gendarmerie from the army and restoring it to the control of the Ministry of the Interior. It was disagreement on this very point which had caused Shishakli to overthrow Dawalibi's Government in 1951. The reference to this Bill was balanced by much praise of the army and a promise that the Government would provide the best possible military equipment. The Government also proposed to table a Bill to reinstate the Army officers retired by Shishakli. The Prime Minister declared that his Government attached particular importance to the resumption of economic talks with the Lebanon. It would not, however, enter into new obligations with any foreign power; a direct assurance to those who fear union with Iraq. Finally, the Prime Minister undertook to maintain a firm attitude on the Palestine question.

5. One aspect of the present situation which was mentioned in the Prime Minister's statement and which is receiving much publicity is the distribution of rewards and punishments. Five new provincial governors had been appointed temporarily and their predecessors dismissed. Four Ambassadors have so far been dismissed, and there have been many other changes of personnel. Those in the army, where the Left wing is gaining ground, are probably the most important, but they have not yet been made public. Of the old Supreme Court four members served under Shishakli and three resigned. The latter are now being reinstated and the former dismissed.



6. The highly fluid political situation has not yet precipitated into any clear pattern. The most significant aspect is still the activity in which the Left-wing elements led by Hourani have been involved. There have been constant rumours concerning Left-wing participation in the Cabinet. They are said to have been offered two Ministries but to have demanded three including the Ministry of the Interior, which is of paramount importance in view of the forthcoming elections. Jumblat, the Lebanese Druze leader of Leftist views, spent three or four days in Syria trying to bring about some sort of understanding between the Left wing and some of the Populist and Nationalist leaders. It is generally believed that this attempt failed because the concessions demanded by the Left wing were too great. It is not clear what interpretation is to be put upon this, but there can be little doubt that the elections are the main considerations in all this manoeuvring. The Amir Sultan Atrash, who has returned to the Jebel Druze from his refuge in Jordan, has been courted assiduously by leading members of every main party. Amongst others, he was visited by both Hourani and Jumblat.

7. It appears from Press reports that the Left-wing groups, excluding the Communists, are united under Hourani's leadership; but I have heard it suggested by a responsible source that, in fact, the bulk of the Left wing would not follow Hourani if he adopted some of the extreme courses to which he is known to be inclined. Present indications are that there is no agreement between Communist leaders and Hourani, though there may be co-operation between the two groups at a lower level. The Communists have recently acquired control over a daily newspaper which has been equipped with one of the best newspaper printing presses in Syria. The Communists, however, are still a small group operating under cover. They are less formidable than Hourani's Left-wing group and are a good deal further from power.

8. I am sending copies of this despatch to Her Majesty's Ambassadors at Amman, Baghdad and Beirut, and to the Head of the British Middle East Office.

I have, &c.

A. J. GARDENER.

VY 1016/101

No. 13

#### REPORT ON THE POLITICAL SITUATION FOLLOWING THE GOVERNMENT'S RESIGNATION

*Sir John Gardener to Mr. Eden. (Received June 21)*

(No. 91. Confidential)

Damascus,

June 14, 1954.

Sir,

Since my telegram No. 251 of the 12th of June in which I had the honour to report that the Government's resignation had been formally accepted, the internal political situation has remained confused. It is not easy to write in the shadow of impending events, yet it may be of some value if I give a brief account of the events leading up to the resignation of Sabri Assali's Cabinet and of the political prospects as they appear at present.

2. During Ramadan, the Moslem month of fasting, which covered most of May and the early part of June, the political tension had slowly been building up, so that when the feast came, early in June, it was expected that there would be a crisis of some sort. The crisis proved to be a psychological one arising out of the frustration and distrust which had been produced by the selfish and dilatory motions of the Government. Public opinion, and especially the Press, talked so much of a crisis of confidence that finally they brought it about. In fact it was justified, for the Government had failed during its three months in office to achieve its declared objective of getting elections under way. Parliament too had been dilatory. It was only just before the resignation of the Government that the important Parliamentary Committee considering amendments to the electoral law rejected the Left-wing proposals (mainly the introduction of proportional representation) and reported back to the Chamber in the sense the Government

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wished. Thus there is still no electoral law, for the Parliamentary session stands adjourned until a new Government has taken office. Simultaneously with its failure to maintain confidence in itself, the position of the Government was undermined by the partial overthrow of the two premises upon which it was based, namely that the Army would stay out of politics and that the parties of the Right would act in unison.

3. As I reported in my telegram No. 249 of the 10th of June, there was an abortive *coup d'état* followed by a feeble attempt to arrest the Prime Minister. Neither action went far enough to disclose the full extent of its backing. There was no publicity and no significant arrests were made. It is obvious, however, that these actions were plotted by elements in the Army. An immediate cause was the promulgation of a decree, actually drafted and signed by General Shishakli, which permits the Government to dismiss any Army officer without showing cause. Probably the *coup d'état* and the surrounding of the Prime Minister's house were intended as a warning rather than as a serious attempt to take over the Government, which the Army is probably not ready to do. As yet it has no accepted leader and is split into several groups. Moreover it is well aware of the popular dislike of military intervention in Government. Nevertheless it cannot be expected that the Left-wing group of officers, who have strong political feelings, are relatively numerous and hold many key positions, will stay quiet indefinitely.

4. Unfortunately the ineptitude of the Right-wing politicians provides only too clearly both an incentive and an opportunity for military intervention. The objects of the Left-wing group in the Army are to put Akram Hourani, the leader of the Arab-Socialist party, in power and to ensure that the Army itself is not neglected. The attitude of public opinion makes them hope to achieve this in a constitutional way. The first step, therefore, is to scare away the politicians opposed to them. Hence the surrounding of the Prime Minister's house. The second step is to put in a Cabinet of neutrals to supervise the elections. It appears, however, that the various independent politicians approached by the Left-wing group in the Army have each refused to co-operate. Having suffered this check, it will be interesting to see whether the Left-wing officers try to drive on to the third stage, the forced installation of Hourani in power. Public opinion and the lack of unity in the Army are, however, powerful reasons for proceeding in a constitutional way.

5. For men who are aware of the danger of Army intervention, if the Government should fail to carry out what is expected of it or even if it should merely seem too weak, the Right-wing politicians have acted in a rash and petty manner. This was no doubt what Nazim Qudsi, the Populist leader and President of Parliament, meant when he remarked to me bitterly that the Nationalists did not understand present conditions and were inflexible in their ideas. At the bottom of the Government's inefficiency and weakness has been a growing rift between the Populist and Nationalist parties. It is anomalous to have a Nationalist Prime Minister with a large Populist majority in the Chamber. Also the traditional differences on the question of union with Iraq still have a potent effect. But these difficulties could have been overcome, or at least overlooked, if the Government (and the parties from which it was formed) had pushed ahead with their task of holding elections. Instead they procrastinated and bickered over minor points, especially over personalities. The chief difference has centred on Dawalibi, the Populist Minister of Defence, who was Prime Minister when General Shishakli carried out his military *coup d'état*. On that occasion Dawalibi was the last of the politicians to be released from prison. Perhaps because of this he has a grudge against the Army and seems to have tried to run the Ministry of Defence in a scarcely less dictatorial manner than did General Shishakli. The effect has been to unite the Army on one point at least, that of opposition to Dawalibi.

6. Another result of the Government's ineptitude has been the resuscitation of the Arab Liberation Movement founded by General Shishakli. Following the fall of their patron the Movement seemed dead and its members lay low. Then in May Parliament passed a law requiring the return of the salaries and expenses paid to members of Shishakli's Parliament and making similar provisions which might affect the status and financial position of a great number of Civil Servants. This spiteful measure which was intended to discourage future collaboration with

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an unconstitutional régime has so far failed in that aim. It has, however, roused general resentment in responsible quarters and in particular stung the Arab Liberation Movement (members of which were to be the principal victims) into holding several meetings at which the constitutional authority of the present régime was attacked. The members of the Movement must now be ready to work for any political change.

7. The prospects for the future are uncertain even in the context of the notorious instability of Syrian politics. The main possibilities which are being discussed in the Press and in the coffee houses are as follows:—

- (a) An Army *coup d'état*. Certainly there are many hotheads in the powerful Left-wing group within the Army, but in view of the difficulties mentioned above, it is probable that the Army would prefer *for the present* to bide its time, especially if (b) or (c) below prove a real alternative.
- (b) Coalition of Nationalist, Populist and Ba'ath Parties, possibly with an independent Prime Minister. There is strong opposition to this on the part of the Right-wing, but it is possible that Leftish elements among the Populists might feel tempted by such a scheme.
- (c) A neutral Government. This has a strong popular appeal but it might be difficult to find genuine neutrals. It would be understandable too if they were reluctant to take power for a brief period while running the risk of incurring much odium. Husni Barazi (Personalities No. 26) told me that he has volunteered for office, but I doubt if he will be acceptable.
- (d) A reshuffle of the Government which has just resigned by which Dawalibi and certain others would be dropped.

If (a) above occurred elections might be postponed for a long time. If (b), (c) or (d) came to pass it would be in the interests of the Government to hold elections urgently. No civilian régime, unless a puppet of the Army, would be in a position to do anything positive until elections had been held.

8. I am sending copies of this despatch to Her Majesty's Ambassadors at Cairo, Paris, Washington, Baghdad, Beirut and Amman and to the Head of the British Middle East Office.

I have, &c.

A. J. GARDENER.

VY 1016/103

No. 14

#### ACCOUNT OF THE FORMATION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF SAID GHAZZI

*Sir John Gardener to Mr. Eden. (Received June 28)*

(No. 95. Secret)  
Sir,

*Damascus,  
June 22, 1954.*

In my despatch No. 91 of the 14th of June, I carried the story of Sabri Assali's Government down to the point at which it resigned, partly through internal dissension, partly through a manifest lack of public confidence. I described the resulting vacuum and the various possible Governments which might arise to fill it. In fact, the popular appeal of the idea of a neutral Cabinet proved sufficient to overcome the opposition of most of the professional politicians and the difficulty of finding genuine neutrals. As I reported in my telegram No. 260 of the 19th of June, Said Ghazzi formed a six-man Government pledged to carry out elections at the earliest possible date. I now have the honour to give an account of the formation of this Government and to describe the present political situation in Syria.

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2. The period between the fall of Assali's Government and the final announcement of the formation of Ghazzi's Cabinet lasted eight days and was filled with unending rumours of political bargaining. An attempt was made to form a Coalition Government in which the Nationalist, Populist and Ba'ath Parties would all be represented. This, however, foundered on the question of the distribution of portfolios. No party was content to see the Ministry of the Interior, with its responsibilities for elections, in the hands of another party. Following the abandonment of the idea of a tripartite coalition, there were strong rumours that Assali's Cabinet would be reshuffled and reconstituted on the same basis but without Dawalibi, the former Minister of Defence, and one or two of his colleagues. This no doubt was the aim of the politicians of the Right-wing parties and perhaps of the President himself. It was, however, frustrated not only by the dissension between Nationalists and Populists which had originally contributed to the fall of the Government, but also by the very real fear that it would drive the army and Ba'ath Party further together and might produce overt military intervention. Consequently the politicians were forced seriously to consider the possibility of a neutral Government.

3. By this time it was clear that public opinion was tired of selfish intrigues and there were many who said that if a neutral Cabinet could not be formed it would be better to let the army, who at least were efficient, run the elections, rather than permit the politicians to play their old tricks in the old way. The difficulty was to try to find a Cabinet that all parties considered neutral. Various personalities were suggested only to be rejected. Said Ghazzi was asked but he, like Hassan Hakim before him, refused the task. Eventually, however, he was persuaded, like a second Cincinnatus, to leave his land in the south and take over the Government. There was some feeling of surprise that so respectable and neutral a figure should have been found and that all the difficulties in the way of his taking office should have been overcome. One of these difficulties, which added to the respect in which Said Ghazzi was held, was the fact that he had sworn allegiance to the Constitution of 1947 and during the changes since that time had steadfastly refused to take part in politics since his oath would thereby be violated. Now apparently his scruples were overcome but a new difficulty arose. He insisted that he himself should be allowed to stand at the forthcoming elections. Though this was hardly in accord with the general conception of neutrality, it was proving so difficult to find a Prime Minister that Said Ghazzi's condition was accepted and he alone of his Cabinet was authorised to stand as a candidate.

4. The final announcement of Said Ghazzi's Cabinet was delayed for several hours as a result of last-minute squabbles over personalities and portfolios. Eventually, however, five men at least not unacceptable to the three major parties were found to join Said Ghazzi. The strength of the Government is three-fold. In the first place it was so difficult to form it that there can be few who wish to have another bout of Cabinet making soon. Secondly, the members of the Cabinet are all of good reputation; thirdly, several of them are proven administrators.

5. On the afternoon of the 19th of June Parliament met to hear the Prime Minister's statement of policy. It was very brief, but it made three points quite clearly. The Prime Minister declared that the basic aim of his Government was to carry out elections as soon as possible with complete neutrality. He told Parliament that it was their duty immediately to pass an electoral law which would permit elections to be held at the earliest possible date. Finally he said that in the field of foreign policy his Government would maintain sisterly relations with the Arab States within the framework of the Arab League: they would watch the Palestine question and would maintain amicable relations with all friendly States without entering into any new obligations. Parliament voted its confidence in the Government without debate by sixty-seven votes to one. More than twenty Deputies did not attend. Among them was Akram Hourani the Left-wing leader. This may mean that the Left-wing parties are preparing to boycott the elections or to denounce their validity.

6. Throughout the negotiations for a Cabinet and even after its formation there has been an undercurrent of unrest and uncertainty which has arisen from the fear that some section in the army might take advantage of the confused situation to forward its own particular aims. Simultaneously with the

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announcement of the Cabinet came the news that Colonel Safa (Syrian Personalities No. 100) and four other officers had been arrested. Since then, according to secret sources, sixty non-commissioned officers and other ranks have been arrested. The charge in each case was that of attempting to create unrest in the ranks of the army. It is interesting that those arrested and detained are all past or present members of the army. There had been previous attempts to arrest Colonel Safa during his recent clandestine visits to Aleppo and Damascus. It is well known that there is a bitter hatred between him and some of the leading army officers. In particular he is disliked and mistrusted by the army for his open advocacy of some form of union with Iraq. The insignificance of those arrested with him indicates that his plots were not likely to be dangerous. Nevertheless it seems clear that the army decided to purge its own ranks of those suspected of favouring union with Iraq. It was no doubt also intended that this should be a warning to the many politicians who are believed to hold similar views. Secret sources report that Sabri Assali, the last Prime Minister, Maruf Dawalibi, his Minister of Defence, and Adnan Atassi, the politically-influential son of the President of the Republic, are under surveillance because they are suspected of supporting a scheme for union with Iraq.

7. While the Government at present seems to enjoy popular favour and some measure of army support, it is nevertheless in need of all the strength it can gather. Nothing would so much contribute to consolidating its position as the announcement of elections for a definite date in the near future. But much more than this will be required to cure the malaise in the body politic revealed by the recent crisis. The more the politicians manoeuvred the more evident it became that the trouble was not merely a temporary loss of confidence in an inefficient Government. From talks with leading Syrians and diplomatic colleagues I have the impression that the country at large is mistrustful and tired of the accepted political party leaders and their ploys. This mistrust of its leading personalities is bringing the régime itself into disrepute. Since the present régime is the most pro-Western that is likely to emerge in the xenophobic atmosphere of Syrian politics any change is likely to be of benefit only to the Russians whose activity here, as I have already reported, is increasing. The predominant political feeling in Syria is the conviction that the present ruling class, who achieved their position by heredity or through the acquisition of fortunes, are not the men to bring about the measures of social reform which are widely considered both right and necessary. There is little doubt that social reform, and particularly reform of the so-called feudal system, will eventually be brought about. The important question is how and when. Unfortunately there is little sign of a moderate middle-class movement which might satisfy the growing feeling of the need for social reform and at the same time pursue a pro-Western foreign policy.

8. I am sending copies of this despatch to Her Majesty's Ambassadors at Cairo, Baghdad, Beirut and Amman and to the Head of the British Middle East Office.

I have, &c.

A. J. GARDENER.

VY 1861/35

No. 15

**OPENING ON SEPTEMBER 23 OF THE DAMASCUS INTERNATIONAL  
TRADE FAIR BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC**

*Sir John Gardener to Mr. Eden. (Received September 9)*

(No. 139. Unclassified)

*Damascus,*

Sir,

*September 4, 1954.*

I have the honour to report that the Damascus International Trade Fair was opened by the President of the Syrian Republic on the 2nd of September.

2. This Fair is the first of its kind to be held in Syria. The idea was first conceived about eighteen months ago during the time of President Shishakli. It was originally intended to be held in September, 1953, but shortage of time caused its postponement until this month.

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3. The opening ceremony took place at 5.30 p.m. at the Sports Amphitheatre which forms a part of the Fair ground. Before a vast concourse of the Diplomatic Corps, Syrian officials and the general public, Dr. Khaled Bozu, the Director-General of the Damascus Fair Organisation, made the opening speech of welcome and the usual eulogies appropriate to such an occasion. He was followed by Assad Kourani, the Minister for National Economy, who outlined the progress of Syria's economy, particularly in the agricultural and industrial spheres. He emphasised the rapid development that had been made during the last ten years since Syria achieved her independence, despite mistakes and difficulties that had been encountered in the process. The Minister stressed the policy of his Ministry to introduce improvements in the field of labour relations and to raise the standard of working conditions as a whole. He concluded with the hope that the closer association between economists, industrialists and merchants of Syria and of other countries that could be formed by the Fair would lead to higher quality production of Syrian goods, greater competition and would stimulate trade between Syria and other countries to their mutual advantage. The Fair was then formally declared open by the President of the Republic. The President, accompanied by Heads of Diplomatic Missions and senior officials, then visited the national pavilions which represent the twenty-five countries taking part officially in the Fair.

4. The design and size of the national pavilions varied with each country. In the bright illumination of the evening, however, the impression gained was one of a enclosure of widely differing buildings each showing a characteristic feature of its own national entity and containing a variety of exhibits covering the manufactures, industries and cultural attractions of that country. The walls of some pavilions are covered with pictures or paintings of cities, factories and countrysides and in the Russian pavilion a large painting, covering the whole of one section of the wall, pictures in bright colours the sunshine, happiness and prosperity that comes to the children and workers of the "happy" Russian State. The Syrian Government pavilion shows the main features of Syria's economy, agriculture and industry, and such other activities as civil aviation and development projects. The display in that pavilion achieves, in my opinion, a high standard in finish, lay out and general interest. Indeed, when it is remembered that this Fair is the first experience of its kind that the Syrians have had and has been done entirely by their own efforts with the advice of a few foreign experts, I consider that the whole enterprise reflects creditably on their resolution to produce a project which, with lesser determination, might well have foundered on the way. Owing to delays and inexperience some of the stands, particularly those occupied by individual firms, were not completed and, indeed, many of the general arrangements and the lay out of the Fair ground are still far from complete. In contrast, however, to the total lack of preparedness and the chaotic confusion that existed a week ago it was remarkable what had been effected within the last few days. This result was aided by the use of military units who were drafted in and worked day and night during the final days.

5. I made a particular point of visiting the main British stands, organised by the agents of British firms, and I was struck by the impressive and encouraging display produced entirely by the individual efforts of the local agents. Some of these had received encouraging backing from their British principals but others, in the absence of any support whatsoever from their principals, had made an effective display on their own. Worthy of particular notice were the exhibitions of agricultural machinery, tractors, diesel engines, some motor cars, the Iraq Petroleum Company and the British Overseas Airways Corporation. The stands of the agents of certain British firms had not been finished in time for the opening but will start in the next few days. The British products which I saw, however, were of a sufficiently high standard and great enough in quality that, had they alone been concentrated in one stand, they would have been sufficient to form a national British pavilion which could have worthily held its place amongst the other national pavilions where Britain was a notable absentee.

6. In the line of foreign pavilions the scene is dominated by the vast Russian pavilion in white, brilliantly lit up, surrounded by red flags and with a flood-lit golden spire surmounted by an illuminated red star. This striking building seems quite overwhelming to visitors looking at the Fair as a whole. Nevertheless, it was heartening to hear the remark of the Syrian agent of a leading British firm of agricultural machinery, whose stand faces the Russian pavilion, that: "It is really

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rather bad luck on the Russians being next to my stand because people will see the Russian agricultural machinery and will then immediately afterwards see my own British machinery and will compare the difference in quality between Russian manufacture and the greatly superior British manufacture to the detriment of the Russian."

7. It is too early yet to report in detail the variety of goods displayed and the characteristics of the various national pavilions. Indeed many of these are still not yet complete. As the Fair progresses, however, full reports of the various goods exhibited and other matters of interest connected with the national and private pavilions will be reported to the Board of Trade and to other departments concerned. In conclusion, I would say that, although many shortcomings are apparent and there might be a tendency by some to enlarge on the deficiencies of the Damascus Fair when compared to other longer established international fairs, in my view, Syria deserves credit for what she has created by her own unaided efforts even though the object in holding this Fair can be only a matter of prestige and can hardly lead to a strengthening of Syria's economy and production or trade since Syria herself has little more to offer to other countries than she does, in fact, at present provide.

8. I am sending copies of this despatch to Her Majesty's Representatives at Ammam, Ankara, Baghdad, Beirut, Cairo, Jedda, Tel Aviv, Bahrain and Kuwait, to the Head of the British Middle East Office, Fayid, to the Development Division of the British Middle East Office, Beirut, and to the Commercial Relations and Exports Department of the Board of Trade.

I have, &c.  
J. GARDENER.

VY 1861/40

No. 16

REPORT ON THE DAMASCUS INTERNATIONAL TRADE FAIR

Mr. Gallagher to Mr. Eden. (Received October 9)

(No. 154. Confidential)  
Sir,

Damascus,  
October 6, 1954.

With reference to Her Majesty's Ambassador's despatches Nos. 139 and 150 of the 4th and 29th of September respectively, I have the honour to report that the Damascus International Trade Fair, which opened on the 2nd of September closed, according to plan, on the 1st of October. The impressive attendance throughout this period led the organisers to consider extending the fair for a further fortnight, but this plan had to be abandoned when it was found that many of the exhibitors had commitments elsewhere and would be obliged, in any case, to close their stands on the date originally fixed for the end of the fair.

2. The fair was an unqualified success and has undoubtedly done much to enhance Syrian prestige not only among the other Arab States but also in the wider international field. It is a tribute to Syrian organisation and tenacity of purpose that, in spite of the political vicissitudes of the past year and the various material difficulties with which the organisers were faced, this new venture—the first post-war International Fair to be held in an Arab country—opened on time and that the few national pavilions not quite completed on the 2nd of September were ready for occupation a few days later. This effort was well rewarded. Although no official figures are available, it is reliably estimated that an average of 30,000 people visited the fair each day and that the total attendance exceeded 1 million. Visitors consisted mainly of Syrians, Jordanians and Lebanese; but merchants and others came from the neighbouring Middle East countries and from further afield. It is therefore not surprising that the Syrian authorities have decided in principle to make the fair an annual event and that other Arab countries—in particular Egypt and the Lebanon—spurred on by the success of the Damascus Fair, are said to be planning to hold international fairs of their own.

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3. As reported in Her Majesty's Ambassador's despatch No. 150 of the 29th of September, the Damascus Fair was not a trade fair in the accepted sense. It followed closely the pattern of the *Expositions Internationales* held in Paris during the pre-war period, although it was necessarily on a smaller scale. The main feature was a series of national pavilions—twenty-four in all—in which the participating countries displayed exhibits showing their natural resources, industry, agriculture and principal products. Individual firms—Syrian and foreign—exhibited either in the appropriate national pavilions or in separate stands, presumably with the object of taking orders. The commercial aspect of the fair, however, was clearly of secondary importance. It is difficult to estimate how much business was transacted, but a leading Syrian agent for British goods told me that his object in exhibiting was not to sell his products but rather to keep them before the public eye in the hope that this would lead to orders at a later date.

4. The political character of the fair was emphasised by the array of national pavilions representing the Communist countries. In fact, the Soviet bloc accounted for a fifth of the total number of pavilions. Russia, China, Hungary, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia participated and had obviously gone to considerable trouble and expense to create an impression. The Soviet pavilion, with its high tower surmounted by a red star (see photograph enclosed)<sup>(1)</sup> undoubtedly dominated the fair and the Chinese pavilion, although badly situated owing to China's belated decision to participate, was only slightly less impressive. The more modest Bulgarian pavilion was considered by many to be the best at the fair from the point of view of the arrangement of the exhibits and their intrinsic interest.

The extent of Communist participation is consistent with the increased Soviet interest in Syria which has become apparent in recent months. The Soviet Union and China are not interested in developing trade with Syria and business people enquiring at the two pavilions about the possibility of purchasing various items of equipment displayed met with non-committal but discouraging replies. The Communist pavilions were, in fact, mainly a façade for propaganda and provided the countries concerned with an opening to make useful contacts with all sections of Syrian society and, in particular, to impress the untravelled and parochial-minded Syrian for whom the fair exercised an irresistible attraction. The absence of official British and United States participation, on which Her Majesty's Ambassador has commented in the despatches under reference, unfortunately gave the Communists a clear field.

6. Although, as stated above, the Soviet pavilion was the most impressive building, the exhibits which it housed were disappointing by Western standards. Nevertheless, in quantity and size, they undoubtedly made an impression on the unsophisticated who, in the absence of a British or United States pavilion, had no basis for comparison. A member of the staff who was on holiday in a remote mountain village in north-west Syria tells me that a large number of villagers managed to visit the fair and all returned full of praise for the Soviet pavilion. These people are by no means Communist and I fear that their reactions may have been shared by other Syrians from the provinces for whom special trips were arranged and who flocked to Damascus by the thousand. It is significant that some responsible Syrians hold the view that the success of Khalid Bkdash, the Syrian Communist leader, in the general election was in some measure due to the impression made by the Soviet bloc at the fair. Moreover, I have heard senior Syrian Civil Servants expressing some surprise at the quality of the Communist exhibits which, they thought came much closer to Western standards than they had been led to believe.

7. How far this impression was mitigated by the last-minute decision of the United States Government to arrange for Cinerama to be shown at the fair is difficult to assess. It certainly constituted a powerful counter-attraction and the open-air theatre in which it was held (which seated about 2,000) was filled to capacity for the twice-nightly performances given throughout the fair. It certainly worried the Soviet Legation sufficiently for them to arrange a special showing of Soviet colour films at one of the local cinemas. In the absence of a United States pavilion, the Cinerama was undoubtedly an excellent form of American participation; there was, in fact, a touch of genius in the last-minute decision to provide this attraction. But it is difficult to resist the conclusion that it drew the

<sup>(1)</sup> Not printed.

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crowds because it was unusual and was rather in the nature of a "stunt" and that, being different in nature from the Communist exhibits, it did not go quite as far as its sponsors intended to counteract the effect produced by the Soviet and satellite pavilions.

8. It remains to be seen whether and to what extent the Soviet Union follows up the advantages it has gained through Communist participation in the fair. Meanwhile, the prestige which Syria has acquired in organising this event will be a useful asset to the new Government which, after an interregnum of nearly eight months, will be faced with a number of major questions affecting Syria's relations with neighbouring Arab States and with the West. One of the major obstacles to the healthy evolution of Syrian foreign policy is the atmosphere of xenophobia built up during the successive military régimes. In spite of the effect which the Communists have created, it may well be that the influx of foreign visitors to Damascus and the opportunity which the fair afforded to ordinary Syrians to see something of the way of life of other countries will help to some extent to overcome the pathological distrust of foreigners which no Syrian Government has so far been able safely to ignore.

9. I am sending copies of this despatch (without enclosure) to Her Majesty's Representatives at Amman, Baghdad, Beirut and Cairo; and to the Head of the British Middle East Office.

I have, &c.

F. G. K. GALLAGHER.

VY 1104/4

No. 17

**REPORT ON THE PROSPECTS OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT**

*Mr. Gallagher to Sir Anthony Eden. (Received November 1)*

(No. 165 E. Confidential)

*Damascus,*

*October 26, 1954.*

Sir,

The recent general election in Syria has brought to an end a period of some eight months of provisional Government. No important decisions have been taken on internal or external matters since the collapse of the Shishakli régime last February, and the new Government will therefore be faced with a legacy of undecided questions calling for immediate consideration. Their task will be made the more difficult by the expectation on the part of the general public that the return of democratic Government after a succession of military dictatorships will lead to the initiation of new and different policies; and by recent events in the Middle East, particularly the signature of the Anglo-Egyptian agreement, which calls for a reappraisal of Syria's attitude towards the West. In external affairs, the problems facing the new Government are to a large extent common to other Arab States. Internally, the problems are in the main economic and peculiar to Syria. It may therefore be useful if I attempt to describe these economic problems and the general economic background against which they will have to be considered.

2. In 1945, when Syria achieved full independence, her economy was that of a backward rural country whose agriculture barely sufficed to meet the needs of the population and whose industries were few and catered solely for a small part of Syria's internal requirements. Since then, remarkable progress has been made in both agriculture and industry. Syria is predominantly an agricultural country and her main exports are cereal and cotton crops. In contrast to the position a few years ago when, after a poor season, Syria had to import grain, she now exports some 300,000 tons of wheat and 250,000 tons of barley a year and between 40,000 and 60,000 tons of cotton. It is expected that, from now on, these exports will increase steadily. This favourable position has been brought about by the encouragement given to agricultural development by successive Syrian Governments since 1945 and by the steady progress made in agricultural development projects, notably in irrigation. Several major projects of this kind, such as the Ghab Valley drainage, the Khabour irrigation system and the Barada irrigation and hydro-

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electric scheme, have been completed or are well under way. The cultivation of cereal crops is left largely to the landowners and farmers, since no Government has had the resources or trained staff to exercise control or to organise co-operative societies or similar systems. The cultivation of cotton is, however, controlled by the Government which insists on limitations of acreage, the use of sterilised seeds and the regular spraying of crops. This control serves to keep away cash-crop speculators and to ensure that cotton, which is Syria's most valuable export, is cultivated in a scientific and steadily improving manner.

3. On the industrial side, Syria has made rapid progress. Her chief industrial centre is Aleppo. Both there and in Damascus and Homs, there are well established and well-run factories producing textiles of all kinds, cement, oils, soaps, flour milling, glass, leather goods, canned goods, sugar, cigarettes and other smaller wares. Some of these products, notably textiles, are exported to neighbouring countries but the bulk of Syria's industrial output goes to meet the needs of her own population.

4. This remarkable transition from a backward agricultural country dependent on imports to a largely self-sufficient and economically independent country with thriving agricultural exports, would not have been possible without the highly protectionist and nationalist policy followed in recent years, particularly under the Shishakli régime. Besides the direct encouragement given to agriculture by improved irrigation and the introduction of mechanised farming, Syria's industries have been protected by high tariffs or the total prohibition of the import of articles produced in Syria. Enlightened Syrians have admitted that it would not be wise for their severely protectionist policy to continue indefinitely, but they consider it essential until Syria's economy is sufficiently strong to compete on equal terms with other countries.

5. The most notable event in Syria's economic history in recent years has been the deterioration in Syro-Lebanese economic relations. In March 1950 the Customs Union Agreement between Syria and the Lebanon was denounced and each country thereafter pursued an independent economic policy. Until that time, the economy of Syria had been largely in the hands and under the control of Lebanese merchants. Since then, Syria has followed a determined policy of removing Lebanese control and interests from Syrian trade and of placing this, instead, in the hands of Syrians. Law 151 of March 1952 was primarily designed to exclude Lebanese merchants and agents from Syrian markets, though it unfortunately had the same effect on other foreign representatives, including British. The rapid development of the port of Lattakia as a rival to Beirut and to handle Syrian imports and exports is part of the same policy.

6. Consistent with this determination to establish her economic independence, and encouraged by the growing spirit of nationalism throughout the country, Syria has rigidly refused to accept, or to ask for, any form of foreign economic or material aid. There is therefore no Point IV programme, military aid nor even an International Bank loan in Syria at present. All development schemes and other projects are being undertaken entirely from Syria's own resources which, although substantial in relation to her size, are slender in comparison with what is needed for the development of the country. In addition, Syria is sadly lacking in trained administrators, engineers and technical staff experienced in any form of public undertaking. The result is that, although the progress achieved by Syria in recent years has been remarkable and steady, it is nevertheless slow. Foreign aid, such as an International Bank loan, would directly serve to accelerate the pace of Syria's economic development and would, in turn, bring greater prosperity to the country. The agricultural potential of Syria's north-eastern province of Jezireh, particularly for the cultivation of cereals and cotton, is immense; but without large sums of money, as well as trained engineers and administrators, the riches of this area must remain largely unexploited. The inadequacy of the road system and the poor state of existing roads is such that they present a serious handicap to the movement of Syria's agricultural exports and add greatly to their cost. Hydro-electric power and power for irrigation, which could do much to expand all forms of agricultural output, have scarcely begun in this country where the opportunities for the development of such power are highly favourable.

7. This outline of Syria's economic position presents a picture of remarkable but slow progress from an underdeveloped state into one which has attained a large measure of economic independence, but whose economic potential is still largely

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undeveloped owing to the inadequate resources of the country. Against this background, the new Government will have to consider whether to rest content with this slow rate of progress, which enables it to do without foreign aid and thus enhances the feeling of Syrian independence, or whether to introduce a practical and realistic policy of accepting foreign aid to develop the economic resources of the country, including the ancillary services such as the road system. One of the first matters which must be considered by the new Government is the Report prepared by the Economic Survey Mission of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which spent two months here earlier this year and carried out a detailed survey of Syria's overall economic position in order to make recommendations for future economic development. This Report is expected to be received by the Government this month and a decision must then be made whether to negotiate with the International Bank for a loan to undertake some or all of the schemes recommended by the Mission. Negotiations with the International Bank have been conducted intermittently for the past three years without result. This was due to the strong nationalist policy of General Shishakli, who refused to accept the supervision of the International Bank and who was unwilling to take a loan with strings attached.

8. Another pressing problem arises from the fact that Syrian agricultural production is increasing rapidly and, with favourable prospects this year for all the major crops, there is a small boom of prosperity in the country. This very increase of production, however, is by itself creating a situation which may well endanger the economic structure of the country since the mechanical means for handling it—such as roads, transport, storage facilities and trained staff—are proving so inadequate that there is a risk that the structure will collapse unless it can be strengthened in time. It is possible that the seriousness of the situation may lead future Governments to relax the rigid policy of protection and independence which has been followed in the past.

9. One other major problem which must be faced by the incoming Government is that of Syro-Lebanese economic relations. Mr. Samuel's despatch No. 12E (11203/1/53) of the 23rd of January, 1953, described the state of Syro-Lebanese economic relations up to that date. Since then negotiations have continued intermittently to establish a mutually acceptable system of trade. These negotiations and the state of commercial rivalry between the two countries have led at times to acrimonious and bitter campaigns in the Press and to tense situations affecting the political as well as the economic relations of the two countries. So far the negotiations have had no result and the position remains virtually unchanged. Meanwhile, trade continues to be governed by the provisional Economic Agreement of February 1952, which is extended from time to time. This device saves either Government from having to make a final decision on this thorny problem. Although many Syrians wish to see closer relations between Syria and the Lebanon and agreement on certain matters such as customs and freedom to exchange certain goods, the predominant feeling in Syria is that, as the country has now attained her economic freedom, she must never revert to a position of subjugation to Lebanese commercial or financial control. This feeling is strengthened by the realisation that since the breakdown of the pre-1950 economic union, Syria's economic position has been one of steady development and of increasing prosperity.

10. In pursuance of her policy of establishing herself as a strong, economically independent country, Syria has made trade and economic agreements with a number of countries during the past two years. These include Greece, India, Czechoslovakia, Jordan, Yugoslavia and Japan. She has established a free money market in Damascus and a free Customs Zone. Moreover, the Damascus International Trade Fair, which took place in September and at which 25 countries were represented by national pavilions, has given encouragement to Syria's economic pride. This, in turn, is engendering a feeling in certain circles that Syria's economic strength is such that she may well be able to continue to thrive on the directed and protectionist policy followed in the past.

11. From this review it will be seen that the most important economic decision which the new Government must take is whether to continue to pay lip-service to Syria's nationalism and economic independence by following a policy of protection and continued refusal to accept foreign aid. Under this, Syria's economy may remain on a sound basis, but her economic development will be

slow and many attractive opportunities for progress will be lost. Alternatively, the Government must consider whether, in the interests of speeding agricultural and economic development, she should accept foreign aid and loans and the advice and assistance of foreign experts and thereby enable the potential economic resources of the country, now largely untapped owing to the smallness of Syria's population and her own administrative and financial means, to be exploited to the direct economic advantage of the country as a whole. This decision will, however, depend more on political than on purely economic considerations. A general policy of co-operation with the West would make it easier for Syria to accept the degree of interference in her internal affairs implicit in the acceptance of outside economic assistance in its various forms.

12. From the economic standpoint, there is little which Britain can do to shape the future course of Syria's industrial and agricultural development. Nevertheless, on the political side, a policy of encouraging Syria to adopt a less suspicious attitude towards the West, might have useful economic results, particularly by making it easier for the Government to apply for loans and technical assistance. If Syria is prosperous and her attention could be drawn away from her morbid preoccupation over Israel by concentration on an ambitious programme of economic development, she could become a strong and stable influence in Middle East affairs. Moreover, there is already a shortage of man-power in this country and the increased demands for labour resulting from such a programme might force the Government seriously to consider the advisability of revising its policy towards the Arab refugees who constitute a badly needed reserve of man-power. Lastly, economic development would serve two useful purposes. Firstly, it would create an increased demand for British goods, particularly agricultural machinery; and secondly, by increasing the standard of living, it would lessen the effectiveness of Communist propaganda among the working-class which, as the recent general election showed, is having a marked and unfortunate effect.

13. I am sending a copy of this despatch to Her Majesty's Ambassador at Beirut, to the Head of the British Middle East Office and to the Commercial Relations and Exports Department of the Board of Trade.

I have, &c.

F. G. K. GALLAGHER.

VY 1016/140

No. 18

PARLIAMENTARY STRENGTH AND FOREIGN POLICY OF  
FARIS EL KHOURI'S GOVERNMENT

*Sir John Gardener to Sir Anthony Eden. (Received November 24)*

(No. 179. Confidential) *Damascus,*  
Sir, *November 15, 1954.*

With reference to my despatch No. 172 of November 3 describing the formation of the new Syrian Government, I have the honour to submit the following estimate of the Government's parliamentary strength and foreign policy.

2. As already reported in my telegram No. 398 of November 4, the Government's majority in the vote of confidence was less satisfactory than the figures suggested. The tribal *bloc*, one of the three main elements in the coalition, finally decided to support the Government only a few hours before the debate. Co-operation between the Nationalists and the Populists,

the other two elements of the coalition, is always a doubtful matter, as was emphasised by the collapse only five months ago as a result of internal dissension of the very similar Government led by Sabri Assali. When to this is added Left-wing influence with the students, an important group of army officers and the mob, the Government's grasp on office becomes a precarious matter. No one expects it to last for six months, and most people give it a considerably shorter lease of life. Its support is so uncertain that it might fall at any time. Indeed, no sooner had the Prime Minister received his vote of confidence than he announced that he was looking for a successor and that in no



circumstances would he remain in office beyond March 21, 1955, *i.e.*, after the opening of the next session of Parliament.

3. In these circumstances, it was not surprising that the Government's statement of foreign policy was so cautiously worded that it scarcely amounted to a policy and certainly not to a promise to do anything. Nevertheless, it was the main topic in the long debate in which the Opposition got much the better of the battle. Of the Government supporters almost the only outstanding speaker was the Prime Minister himself. Ranged against him were the Baath-Socialists, the single Communist Deputy and the Left-wing Independents. The interest of the Left wing in foreign policy is shown by the way in which they concentrated upon getting their nominees elected to the Chamber's foreign policy committee. The Communist Deputy and the two chief leaders of the Baath-Socialist Party were all successful. Moreover, one of the latter has since been appointed *rapporteur* of the committee. As soon as the debate began, it became clear that the main object of the Left was to get the Government committed to statements which would make it impossible for them to co-operate in any way with the West.

4. In this they were highly successful, as will appear from the enclosed translation<sup>(1)</sup> of certain passages from the Prime Minister's reply to the debate. He was so stung by the virulent personal attacks made on him by the Left wing that he gave categorical assurances that his Government would not accept any alliances or agreements with non-Arab States and that they would not contemplate peace with Israel even if the refugees' rights to compensation and repatriation or, indeed, the other United Nations resolutions on Palestine were accepted. In the face of these statements and considering their weak parliamentary position, it will clearly be very difficult, if not impossible, to persuade the present Syrian Government to take any reasonable forward step either in regard to defence or to Palestine. This is particularly unfortunate since it would be hard to find any group of Syrian Ministers more generally favourable to the West than the present Cabinet.

5. It is therefore not surprising that a number of responsible Syrians, including the Secretary-General of the Ministry of

Foreign Affairs, have expressed to me in private their feelings of disquiet and dismay at the effects of the present parliamentary situation on the conduct of Syrian foreign policy. The collapse of the Shishakli régime last February gave Syria an opportunity to escape from the strait-jacket of xenophobia and extreme nationalism which had been the fruit of three successive military dictatorships. Although no dramatic change in foreign policy was expected, it was thought that the victory of the Right at the general election would enable a reasonably stable government to embark on a cautious policy of co-operation with the West, more particularly in the light of recent developments in the Middle East, including the signature of the Anglo-Egyptian agreement. These hopes have now been dashed by the precarious parliamentary majority of the new Government and the negative and rigid line taken by the Prime Minister as a result of Left-wing pressure during the debate on his statement of policy.

6. It seems that the only loophole through which the Government might be able to escape from the Prime Minister's assurances is an Arab League resolution, or something of that nature. If Syria is to take any important step in the lifetime of this Government towards joining a defence pact, it could not be done without the open support and co-operation of Egypt and perhaps other Arab States as well. Even then, it is by no means certain that Syria could be induced to relinquish her present neutralist policy. It is very doubtful if even the most attractive of inducements (*e.g.*, large-scale military and economic assistance) would be a satisfactory substitute. A real peace with Israel is, I believe, altogether out of the question at present. The best we could hope to obtain would be the agreement of the Syrian Government to accept a proportion of the refugees after an acceptable offer of compensation or the chance of repatriation; and even this would be a matter of great difficulty.

7. The prospect of Syrian co-operation is therefore bleak, and I can hold out little hope for the immediate future. The obvious alternative to the present Government, or one just like it, is a Left-wing coalition. While it is most important that the less extreme elements in the Left wing should be given a taste of responsibility and educated to understand the realities of the

<sup>(1)</sup> Not printed.

situation, it is probable that this would be a slow process. It will not be helped by the belief held by several persons, both of the Right and the Left, that France is working against a defence pact, lest it should weaken her position in Syria. Indeed, it is generally considered that Khalid al Azm, the leader of the Left-wing Independents and the probable choice of the Opposition for Prime Minister, is in French pay and pledged to prevent a union between Syria and Iraq. In addition, no one doubts that the Saudi Government would spend lavishly to achieve the same end.

8. So far I have discussed Syrian foreign policy only in terms of possible governments, and their strength in the Chamber. It is, however, one of the more interesting aspects of Syrian political development that, as a consequence of the inchoate state of parties and the vacillations of the ruling class, public opinion has a growing

influence. Not unnaturally Syrian public opinion is conditioned by strong, often unreasoning, emotions as in the case of Palestine and relations with the Western Powers, who are suspected of "colonialism" and Zionism. These feelings are matched, but unfortunately not cancelled out, by at least an equal dislike and distrust of Russia. No Government can afford to leave these emotions out of account. This is particularly true of the present Cabinet which is at the mercy of defections to the Left which has not been slow to exploit the latent xenophobia of public opinion.

9. I am sending copies of this despatch to Her Majesty's Representatives at Amman, Bagdad, Beirut, Cairo, Jedda, Tel Aviv, Washington, Paris and Ankara and to the Head of the British Middle East Office.

I have, &c.

J. GARDENER.

VY 10344/4

No. 19

#### SYRIAN-TURKISH RELATIONS

*Mr. Gallagher to Sir Anthony Eden. (Received December 6)*

(No. 183. Confidential)  
Sir,

*Damascus,*

*December 2, 1954.*

I have the honour to report that, with two unimportant exceptions, the Damascus papers published on November 24 an obviously inspired article on Syrian-Turkish relations.

2. The article, which was said to be based on information obtained from a well-informed source, stated that the Turks were making a determined effort to improve their relations with the Arab States and to reach an understanding with them, provided that certain outstanding questions could be satisfactorily settled or postponed to a more suitable time. The forthcoming visit of the Turkish Prime Minister to Cairo reflected this policy. The Arabs, on the other hand, realised that bad relations with Turkey only helped Israel. So far as Syria was concerned, an important factor was the decree published during the Shishakli régime prohibiting Turks from inheriting land in Syria on the death of relatives. The Turkish Government retaliated with a similar decree with the result that Syrian property was being sold in Turkey at a low price. Syria had now proposed that these decrees should be modified. The Turks could also show their goodwill towards Syria by preventing frontier incidents, reducing formalities for Syrian travellers between Aleppo and the Jezira who had to pass through Turkish territory, and by returning lands purchased under the decree to their Syrian owners. At the same time, Turkey, which had only small financial interests in Israel, should refrain from making gestures of friendship towards the Jews which offended the Arabs and the Moslem world, and limit her connection with Israel to such diplomatic intercourse as was strictly necessary. The article ended by emphasising the close ties of history and religion which united Turks and Arabs, called for more contacts between the two countries culturally and otherwise and urged that a genuine effort should be made to remove the present causes of friction.

3. I have since discussed this article with the Turkish Chargé d'Affaires. M. Soysal said that its somewhat unexpected appearance could only be explained in



the general context of relations between Syria and Turkey which, in his view, had been improving steadily in recent months. Turkish policy was to encourage Syrian co-operation with the West. This could best be done in two stages:—

- (a) by working for better relations by settling a number of bilateral questions of secondary importance which had adversely affected Syrian-Turkish understanding in the past; and
- (b) when relations had improved sufficiently, to encourage Syrian membership of a regional defence alliance linked to the West.

The Turkish Government were now at the first stage. The second was a long-term policy and it would be premature to say the least to approach the Syrians about defence matters at the present juncture; the Turks thought it likely that the Syrian attitude would depend upon Egypt's willingness to co-operate with the West.

4. Fortunately, with the end of the Shishakli régime, the Syrians were prepared to improve their relations with Turkey. There was, according to M. Soysal, an influential pro-Turkish element in Syria with strong backing from religious groups who were anxious for a *rapprochement* with an adjoining Moslem country. This tendency fitted in very well with the ideas of the present Syrian Government which wanted to come to terms with its more powerful northern neighbour and was prepared to put the question of Alexandretta on one side in order to achieve this aim. In fact, there were a number of practical reasons why Syria should settle outstanding differences with Turkey since recent tension between the two countries had been most disadvantageous for Syria. The Turkish Government had means of bringing considerable pressure to bear on Syria and, while they had no present intention of exerting this pressure, were nevertheless prepared to take advantage of the threat to Syrian interests resulting from continued bad relations in order to produce an *entente* between the two countries which represented the first stage of their policy towards Syria.

5. I gathered from M. Soysal that the means of pressure open to the Turks were as follows:—

- (a) most of the frontier incidents occurred on the Syrian side after Turkish soldiers had crossed the border. The Syrians genuinely feared a Turkish invasion and regarded these incursions as an attempt by Turkey to test the strength of the Syrian defences.
- (b) many of the rivers of Northern Syria, which was a rich agricultural country, had their source in, and flowed for some distance through, Turkey. Diversion of this water inside Turkish territory for irrigation and other purposes would considerably reduce the flow in Syria. There had already been trouble over water rights and the Syrians now realised that the expensive Youssef Pasha dam which they were constructing on the Euphrates west of Aleppo would be of little use unless the Turks could guarantee that the volume of water reaching the dam remained substantially unchanged. In short, Turkey controlled to some extent the water supply of the Jezira.
- (c) the Turks were building a new railway between Karkamish and Gaziantep which would keep the Bagdad-Instanbul line inside Turkey, instead of passing through Syrian territory via Aleppo as at present. This would be completed in two years' time, after which railway communications between the Jezira and Aleppo, which are extensively used at present for agricultural produce and passengers, would depend on the goodwill of Turkey.

6. According to M. Soysal, the Turks were willing to reach agreement with Syria on all these points and on the succession to land in Turkey by Syrian nationals. The Turkish Foreign Minister had made this clear in the course of a recent talk with the Syrian Minister in Ankara and had also explained the Turkish desire for a *rapprochement* with the Arab States. The Syrian Minister had apparently reported this conversation in detail to Damascus where it had created a very favourable impression. This had been heightened by the results of the annual meeting at Aintab of Turkish and Syrian Mohafazeen from the frontier provinces, at which frontier incidents and water rights had been discussed. M. Soysal said that the proceedings had been very friendly and that, although the results achieved had not been substantial, the Syrian Press had commented in an optimistic vein. The

Syrian Government had therefore decided to inspire the article referred to in paragraphs 1 and 2 above. The Turkish Legation had had no hand in this, but a number of journalists had since called on M. Soysal to discuss Syrian-Turkish relations with him.

7. Although there has undoubtedly been some improvement in Syrian-Turkish relations in recent months, I am inclined to think that M. Soysal is over-estimating the chances of a real *rapprochement* between the two countries in the near future. The policy of the present Syrian Government, as explained by M. Soysal, seems hardly consistent with the state of public opinion in Syria which, in the main, is hostile to Turkey. In the Aleppo region, there is a very real, if irrational, fear of Turkish annexation and, throughout Syria, the transfer of the Hatay to Turkey in 1939 is still a live political issue as was shown by the demonstrations on November 29, reported in Damascus Chancery letter (10104/226/54) of December 1. Moreover, Turkish trade with Israel, particularly the re-exportation of Israeli goods to Arab countries, has attracted much unfavourable comment here. It is difficult to believe that the present Government with its precarious parliamentary majority would pursue a pro-Turkish policy in defiance of public opinion and thus play into the hands of the left-wing groups. It is significant that the article which appeared in the Damascus papers was not followed up by further comment on the subject. The papers, surprisingly enough, made a one-day affair of the article and appear to have published it under pressure. The fact that some journalists subsequently called at the Turkish Legation does not necessarily indicate an interest in the matter; they were probably anxious to discover whether any subsidies would be forthcoming for a pro-Turkish line.

8. I am sending copies of this despatch to Her Majesty's Representatives at Beirut, Bagdad, Amman, Cairo, Ankara, Washington and Paris and to the Head of the British Middle East Office.

I have, &c.

P. G. K. GALLAGHER.

VY 1902/1

No. 20

### SYRIA: HEADS OF FOREIGN MISSIONS

*Sir John Gardener to Mr. Eden. (Received September 22)*

(No. 130. Confidential) *Damascus,*  
Sir, *September 13, 1954.*

With reference to Damascus despatch No. 82 of May 26, 1953, I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the Annual Report on Heads of Foreign Missions accredited to Syria.

I have, &c.

A. J. GARDENER.

Enclosure

#### Heads of Foreign Missions in Syria

(Passages marked with an asterisk are reproduced from previous reports.)

(‡ = formerly Minister.)

#### Argentina

M. Carlos Zamboni, Minister (November 26, 1953).

Both he and his wife speak English and are pleasant people. A rich man who keeps a private plane at Damascus which he flies himself.

#### Brazil

M. Mario Santos, Minister (July 3, 1952). Served previously in Australia. Though seldom seen, he is well known as an eccentric. Spends his time buying oriental objects which will, he declares, make his fortune on resale (free of customs) in Brazil.

#### Chile

M. Miguel Laban, Minister (October 5, 1953). Born in Homs in Syria in 1895. Went to Chile at the age of fifteen and was naturalised in 1927. A wealthy man. He owns the main nylon hosiery factory in Chile and gave valuable financial support to President Ibanez. He speaks only Spanish and Arabic.

#### Egypt

M. le Général Ali Naguib, Ambassador (December 10, 1952).

\*A brother of the Egyptian Prime Minister. During the most difficult moments in Anglo-Egyptian relations, he has always gone out of his way to show friendliness to me; and I believe that he sincerely desires good relations between our two countries. Speaks English but understands it with difficulty. (Written in 1953.)



**France**

M. Jacques Emile Paris, Ambassador (September 30, 1952).

\*Comes from Sofia and has not previously served in the Middle East. It is often difficult objectively to judge one's French colleagues in Damascus, owing to the deep-rooted French suspicion of British motives in Syria. Though he has considerable charm of manner, he has yet to give me a single piece of information or of advice of interest or value. Both he and his wife, who is a daughter of a former secretary-general of the Belgian Foreign Ministry, spend a large part of their time in Beirut and are clearly bored by Damascus, where most of the work of the French Embassy seems to be performed by the Counsellor. (Written in 1951.)

**German Federal Republic**

M. Hans Joachim von der Esch, Minister (October 14, 1952).

\*He was well known in Egypt for some years before the war and I understand that, while ostensibly representing a German engineering firm and allegedly having a penchant for desert exploration, he was in fact preparing the way for the German Long-Range Desert Group. I find him intelligent and agreeable. His Swedish wife is particularly charming. (Written in 1953.)

**Holy See**

Monsignor Paolo Pappalardo (May 21, 1953).

\*The first Papal representative accredited here. Was previously in a similar post for some eight years in Tehran. I have only just met him. (Written in 1953.)

Is still little seen and that little is not impressive.

**Hungary**

M. Karoly Bonyhadi, Chargé d'Affaires (May 13, 1954).

Has previously served in Ankara. Seems pleasant and has some sense of humour. Speaks French.

**Iraq**

M. Abdul-Jalil Al-Rawi, Minister (August 2, 1954).

A professional diplomatist who has served at several posts in Arab countries and as Minister-Counsellor in Washington. He and his wife speak good English and, though staunch nationalists, seem to be well disposed towards us.

**Italy**

M. Paolo Cortese, Minister (November 8, 1952).

\*Friendly but unimpressive. (Written in 1953.)

A member of the South American-Spanish canasta-playing group.

**Persia**

M. Abdulrahim Mirfendereski, Minister (July 22, 1954).

Member of a well-known family of Guilan, North Persia. His last post was Consul-General, Shanghai. A great talker and a light weight.

**Saudi Arabia**

Shaikh Abdul Aziz Ibn Zaid, Ambassador (August 14, 1952).

\*Doyen of the corps. Although he nominally lives in Damascus, he spends most of the winter in Beirut. Speaks no European language. A frail, sick man who looks, and behaves, like a living corpse. (Written in 1951.)

**Soviet Union**

M. Serguei S. Nemtchina, Minister (October 29, 1953).

Born in Leningrad in 1906. Served in Paris before becoming Soviet Minister in Bangkok in 1947. Left there in 1950 and was a member of various Soviet

delegations to international conferences subsequent to his appointment to Damascus.

An affable colleague who attends social events but does not entertain himself. He seems high-powered for his present appointment and his arrival here may indicate a growing Soviet interest in Syrian affairs. He and his wife speak French with a strong accent.

**Spain**

M. Don Ramón Sáenz de Heredia y Manzanos, Minister.

The *agrément* to his appointment has been accorded but he has not yet arrived in Damascus.

**Turkey**

M. Ismail Soysal, First Secretary, Chargé d'Affaires *ad interim* (July 29, 1953).

When he was appointed, it was known that he would serve as head of the mission until Turkish-Syrian relations had sufficiently improved for Turkey to send a Minister to Damascus. Although the Syrians have now appointed a Minister to Ankara, the Turks have not yet reciprocated.

M. Soysal is an intelligent and agreeable young man who is well informed about Syrian affairs. He is, however, inclined to be impetuous and I doubt whether his political judgment is always sound.

**United States**

Mr. James S. Moose, Jr., Ambassador (September 30, 1952).

\*He has served in a wide variety of Middle Eastern posts and was previously here as Counsellor. I have always found him most sensible and co-operative. His wife is an agreeable lady. (Written in 1953.)

**Yugoslavia**

M. Mihailo Javorski, Minister (February 7, 1952).

\*A Bosnian, aged about 35. Married. Has hitherto worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He gives the impression of being a friendly and intelligent colleague. (Written in 1952.)

**RESIDENT IN BEIRUT**

(Those marked with a dagger have secretaries or attachés resident in Damascus)

**Belgium**

†M. Fernand Seynaeve, Minister (October 2, 1952).

**Czechoslovakia**

†M. Cenek Herold, Minister (July 1, 1954).

**Greece**

M. Georges St. Seferiades, Minister (March 5, 1953).

**Mexico**

M. Marco A. Almazan, Third Secretary, Chargé d'Affaires *ad interim* (October 17, 1950).

**Switzerland**

M. Franz Kappeler, Minister (January 8, 1951).

**RESIDENT IN CAIRO****Austria**

M. Clemens Wildner, Minister (November 29, 1953).

**Denmark**

M. Georg L. Host, Minister (December 10, 1953).

**Ethiopia**

M. Ato Marcos Hanna, First Secretary, Chargé d'Affaires, *ad interim* (August 1, 1953).

**Indonesia**

Major-General R. H. Abdul Kadir, Minister (September 3, 1953).

**Japan**

†M. Shigeru Yosano, Minister (July 22, 1954).

**Netherlands**

M. W. Cnoop Koopmans, Minister (January 24, 1952).

**Norway**

M. Christian Prah Reusch, Minister (*Agrément accordé*).

**Poland**

M. Wlodzimierz Paszkowski, First Secretary, Chargé d'Affaires, *ad interim* (December 13, 1951).

**Sweden**

M. Nils Gustaf Weidel, Minister (April 10, 1952).

**RESIDENT IN BAGDAD****Afghanistan**

M. Abdul-Samad Khan, Minister (September 4, 1952).